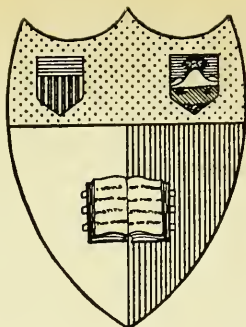


THE STORY OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

—  
EMMA SANSBURY MELLOWS



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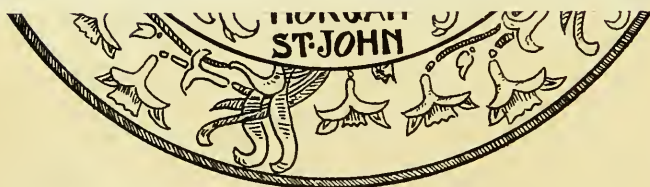
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THE STORY OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE



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THE STORY  
OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY  
EMMA SALISBURY MELLOWS

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## PREFACE

**I**T has been my endeavour, in writing this volume, to tell the story of the beginning and growth of English literature, in a form simple enough to interest the youngest students in our schools and homes and likely to help them to take pleasure in studying this too often neglected subject.

In treating the various periods into which I have divided the history, I have devoted some space to describing the character of the age under consideration. All teachers are conscious of the difficulties which surround young students in their efforts to understand the works of authors who lived in times so distant and so different from our own. I need, therefore, make no apology for thus travelling outside the main province of a history of literature, if by so doing I have helped the reader to enter into the spirit of past ages.

As biography is of special interest to the young, the lives of the great writers of each age are given a prominent place. In the difficult task of selecting authors of proportionate greatness from the host of names which crowd upon an historian, I have been

guided by my desire to present, as far as possible, writers likely to interest youthful readers. This aim has also in some measure governed my choice of illustrative extracts.

Although I hope that this book may prove of real practical use in the schoolroom, I would in no way claim for it the title of a complete history. If it succeeds in awakening an interest in good books, and thus leads our boys and girls to read our great poetry and prose for themselves, my object in writing it will have been attained.

When it has been necessary to go outside the works of the authors in review for dates and facts, I have relied upon those furnished by recognised literary historians and biographers; and I have made use of modern editions of ancient writings. The Anglo-Saxon translations are from the *Anglo-Saxon Literature* of Professor Earle and the English translation of the *Early English Literature* of Ten Brink. The extract from Chaucer is from Professor Skeat's edition.

E. S. M.

January, 1900



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST (FROM THE DAWN OF ENGLISH HISTORY TO 1066) . . . . .	1
II. FROM THE NORMAN CONQUEST TO CHAUCER (1066-1360) . . . . .	18
III. THE AGE OF CHAUCER (1360-1474) . . . . .	31
IV. FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF PRINTING TO THE REIGN OF ELIZABETH (1474-1558). . . . .	49
V. THE ELIZABETHAN AGE (1558-1625) . . . . .	72
VI. THE AGE OF MILTON (1625-1660) . . . . .	117
VII. THE AGE OF DRYDEN (1660-1700) . . . . .	136
VIII. THE AGE OF QUEEN ANNE AND THE FIRST GEORGES (1700-1740) . . . . .	159
IX. THE AGE OF JOHNSON (1740-1790) . . . . .	190
X. THE AGE OF ROMANTIC LITERATURE (1790-1837)	231
XI. THE VICTORIAN AGE (1837-) . . . . .	270



## INTRODUCTION

SO much of our knowledge, so many of our pleasures come to us from the host of books, magazines and papers which fill our public libraries and our bookshelves at school and at home, that it is very difficult to realise that there was ever a time when printed books did not exist, and the possession of one manuscript, carefully written out by some studious monk in the quiet library of his monastery, was a rare and much-valued treasure.

But we have only to go back to the beginning of the fifteenth century, when the art of printing was unknown, and every copy of an author's work had to be made by hand, to discover a very different world of books from the one we see around us to-day.

A glance at the ancient manuscripts in the British Museum will give us some idea of the contents of ancient libraries. Those elaborately decorated, exquisitely neat parchment books were the result of years of patient toil, and were very expensive luxuries to purchase. Few private individuals could hope to possess a library which would in any way compare with the books a schoolboy may now easily collect.

And if we go farther back still, to the ninth and



tenth centuries, we shall find that manuscripts were of almost priceless value. Only in the libraries of the monasteries was reading possible, and so it came about that any youth with a desire for learning was obliged to enter the Church, if he wished to enjoy the few Latin works and the crude productions of his countrymen which the monks so carefully guarded. Even these libraries were very poorly supplied ; a hundred volumes being considered quite a fine collection. The Venerable Bede, living at the end of the seventh and beginning of the eighth centuries, records the selling of a volume on cosmography for eight hides of land (about 500 acres), and, in 855, we hear of a French abbot sending two monks to the Pope to borrow a copy of *Cicero* and some other books ; “for,” says the abbot, “although we have part of these books, yet there is no whole or complete copy of them in all France.”

What would that worthy abbot think if he could be alive now and see our well-stocked bookshelves and our enormous public libraries !

We live in an age of books ; every day sees the production of some new work, which is immediately scattered in thousands of copies broadcast over the land. Do we ever stop to consider that there was a time in England when there were no books, and that all our present limitless supply has grown from such small beginnings as the quaint poetic legends, the songs of the warriors and the Christian writings of the earliest days of our history ?

These ancient works tell us almost everything we

know about our forefathers. In the same way as we learn of the manner of life, the doings and the character of our friend from his letters, so we may know the whole story of the life and growth of our nation from its literature.

The character of each age may be seen in the works of the time. By studying, therefore, the past writings of our countrymen, we learn how a barbarous people gradually threw off their savage customs and developed into a great civilised nation.

There is nothing of which we may be more justly proud than England's long list of great writers. Their work in the world does not end with their deaths ; they are ever with us, aiding us in our search for knowledge, giving us intellectual enjoyment and influencing our whole lives.





# THE STORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

## I.

### BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST

#### THE CELTIC AND ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

FROM THE DAWN OF ENGLISH HISTORY TO 1066

THE earliest inhabitants of these islands of whom we have any real knowledge were the Ancient Britons. They were of Celtic race, a wild and savage people, practising the curious rites of their Druidical religion, and singing or reciting crude songs about their popular heroes and many wars.

**Celtic Literature.**—At first these compositions were learnt by heart, and handed down from one generation to another, but by the third century a form of writing was in use, and the bard, ever the most honoured man of the tribe, cut his verse on the four sides of his tablet staff of office.

The most noted of these old poems, of which we know anything to-day, is called the *Gododin*, and was written by a bard named Aneurin, probably in the sixth century. It was composed in honour of the great chiefs who were beaten by the Saxons in a long and terrible battle.

*Mynddthin*, or *Merlin*, was another famous bard. He sang of the marvellous exploits of *King Arthur*, who is supposed to have lived in the sixth century. Merlin's rude song was but the beginning of a literature about King Arthur. The

real or imaginary deeds of this great British chief have been the theme of many poets from early times even down to our day; for has not Tennyson written a beautiful poem about him in his *Idylls of the King*?

Besides the honouring of heroes in verse, the ancient Celts loved to hear the history of their country recited at public festivals. The chroniclers who composed and told these stories were held in high esteem by the people, and their office was handed down from father to son for many centuries.

The *Psalter of Cashel*, one of their chronicles, is believed to be the oldest bardic legend in existence. It was compiled about the end of the ninth century, by Cornac, Bishop of Cashel and King of Munster.

But the most valuable of Celtic records are the *Annals of the Four Masters of Ulster*. These Annals were compiled towards the end of the eleventh century, by some unknown writer, from a much more ancient manuscript, and are very valuable to-day as one of the few records we possess of the doings of these early inhabitants of the British Isles.

All these old manuscripts are in the Celtic tongue; but the Roman occupation of the land, from B.C. 43 to A.D. 410, left its mark upon the literature of the Celt through the introduction of Christianity and the teaching of the Latin language. The good missionaries from Rome, who taught the Christian religion to the wild races in Ireland in the fourth century, and later in Britain, founded schools and monasteries in many parts of the land, where Celtic converts studied Latin manuscripts and learned to write and speak the Latin tongue.

Much of the good work was undone when the land was conquered by the barbarous Angles and Saxons; but the light of learning kindled by those Roman missionaries never quite died out. In the quiet retreat of an Irish monastery, the Celtic monks persevered in adding to their small stock of knowledge: they sent forth teachers to distant lands, and even wrote Latin works. Thus we hear of Gildas, in the sixth century, and Nennius, in the eighth or ninth, writing Chronicles of their country in Latin.

**The Anglo-Saxons.**—But, although it would be unjust not to recognise the influence of these early Celtic writers on succeeding ages, we must cross the boisterous North Sea to the homes of the Angles and Saxons to discover the main foundations of English literature.

In the little peninsula of Jutland, and along the wild shores of the Baltic, there lived a rude, savage people, inured to every kind of hardship and danger. Not content to remain in their own unfertile country, they made themselves rough boats and went on pillaging expeditions to far-distant lands.

Bravery was the virtue they most esteemed; no exploit was too daring or venturesome for them; and when, after their return from these terrible enterprises, they gathered round the “mead bench” to indulge in feasts prolonged far into the night, it was the stories of the killing of fabulous sea monsters and of the overthrow of huge armies that they delighted to listen to.

This was the race which settled in Britain in the fifth century, and established their own customs, laws, language, and heathen religion throughout the land.

They were our forefathers, and the language they introduced was the foundation of the English tongue we all speak to-day. They called it *Englisc*; we generally talk of it as Anglo-Saxon or Saxon.

There were many dialects of this language spoken by the different tribes who occupied various parts of the land, but the two dialects most important to remember in literature are the Northumbrian and West Saxon.

**Earliest Saxon Poems.**—In their new country the Saxon bards, or gleemen as they were called, went about from court to court singing the few heroic legends and battle songs they had been wont to sing in their old homes; and when, in the seventh century, the art of writing became known amongst them, this quaint rude Saxon verse, so unlike anything we have in modern poetry, was written down.

Some few specimens of these earliest English compositions

are still extant, and in them we may see characteristic pictures of the lives, manners, and customs of our ancestors.

The reintroduction of Christianity in the seventh century marks a step forward in the history of literature.

**Founding of Schools.**—St. Augustine, and the good Irish monks who assisted him, founded schools at Canterbury, York, Yarrow, Wearmouth, and Malmesbury, where Saxon students might study the few Latin and Greek manuscripts the monks possessed.

Northumbria gained much renown for its monastic schools and libraries, and produced the two greatest early scholars, Bede and Alcuin. The fame of Bede's teaching brought six hundred pupils to his quiet monastery at Yarrow. One of his scholars, Egbert, became Archbishop of York, and was the founder of a school and library which drew students from distant lands. Alcuin left this great school in 792 to go to the court of the Emperor of the Franks (Charles the Great) to teach the knowledge he had acquired in England to the people of Western Europe.

In the south of England, at Canterbury, a school flourished for a short time under Archbishop Theodore and his sub-deacon Hadrian, and produced Aldhelm, a great scholar and poet.

To this time of early culture belongs all that is best in Saxon poetry.

But the work of the studious, pious monks in the schools was almost entirely undone in the eighth and ninth centuries, when the invading Danes drove teachers and pupils out of the monasteries and reduced most of the church buildings to ashes.

So low had the light of learning then sunk that King Alfred could find no monk capable of instructing him in the Latin tongue. "Some," he says, "could read a little in their own language, but the knowledge of Latin was so much decayed that few could understand the common prayers of the Church or translate a single sentence of Latin into Saxon."

When we remember that all the learning of those times was



confined to the few Latin writers known to the Church, and that only the clergy and monks learned anything at all, we can form some idea of the ignorance of the people. King Alfred not only delivered his people from the Danes, but he performed the great and good work of educating the clergy and some of the laymen. He rebuilt the monasteries and their schools, and is supposed to have founded a school at Oxford, which was the beginning of the University there.

**First Saxon Prose (Ninth Century).**—This work of teaching went on with especial vigour in the South—in Alfred's country of Wessex. Foreign teachers were invited over, and Latin books translated into Saxon. The king himself was the leading translator of the time, and the first (if we except Bede) to write Saxon prose.

It was a very difficult task for a busy king to take in hand; he had no dictionary or grammar to guide him, and was obliged to invent his spelling and rules for composition. His books were of great value to his countrymen, who could not read Latin, and they likewise served as models to succeeding writers. He wrote in the West Saxon dialect, and nearly all the Saxon writings we possess to-day have come down to us in that dialect.

Alfred's work was continued for some time after his death by the pious monks of Wessex, until the Danish invasions were renewed, and darkness and ignorance fell once more upon the land.

The preaching of Dunstan and the little band of teachers he gathered around him revived learning for a time, towards the close of the tenth century; and on the restoration of the Saxon line, under Edward the Confessor, the writing of sermons, Chronicles, and verse was recommenced.

This revival was, however, of short duration. Norman influence was already at work at the court, and soon the Norman Conquest came, to crush for the time all Saxon literature.

The three divisions into which the writings of these years naturally fall are *Saxon Poetry*, *Latin Works*, and *Saxon Prose*. Of these, *Saxon Poetry* comes first, for, as in the history of all

nations, the Saxon people sang songs about their heroes, their history, their laws, and their religion long before they wrote prose.

But we must not imagine that the quaint, rude productions of the Saxons in any way resembled our modern verse.

They had no rhyme or metre as we understand them, yet they composed according to prescribed rules. Accent and Alliteration are the main characteristics of their poetry. Alliteration is the repetition of the same letter at the beginning of a word. "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper" is an example of very alliterative doggerel.

Saxon poetry was written in the form of short couplets. In each couplet it was necessary that two accented syllables in the first line, and one accented syllable in the second line should begin with the same letter if this initial letter was a consonant; if it should be a vowel the rule was reversed, *i.e.* each of the three accented syllables should begin with a different vowel.

This will be best understood by examples:—

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. $\bar{F}$ irum $\bar{f}$ oldan | 2. $\bar{I}$ t thes $\bar{a}$ nga stede |
| $\bar{F}$ rea allmectig           | $\bar{U}$ ngelic Swithe.                |

The gleemen sang their verse, generally to the harp, and the singer would no doubt lay particular emphasis on the accented alliterative words. Sometimes the lines are much longer than those given in our examples, for there was no rule to restrict the number of unaccented syllables.

In this curious, rugged verse, law, justice, legends, history, and some moral lessons were taught our forefathers from the earliest days of which we have any record. After the introduction of Christianity, Christian poems were composed, and though in the times of the Danish and Norman invasions the harp was silent in Saxon halls and the poet mute, Saxon poetry did not entirely die out in England till long after the Normans had taught the laws of rhyme and metre.

To-day we do not go to these ancient manuscripts of verse to find great ideas and beautiful conceptions; those gleemen



of ancient times were neither Shakespeares nor Miltons. Their poems are primitive and rough in every way. They constantly use metaphors. Thus, the sea is spoken of as "the whale's road," "the water street"; a ship is "a wave traverser," "a floating wood." They repeat their crude ideas over and over again, and indulge in long descriptions of events which have nothing to do with the story they are telling. But their work is of great interest as the *beginning of English literature, and the earliest existing poetry in any modern language.*

Among these Saxon poems *The Song of the Traveller* and *The Romance of Beowulf* are thought to be the oldest. They were composed by unknown poets in the early homes of the Saxons around the shores of the Baltic, probably in the sixth century, and were introduced into England by the gleemen.

Of the poems composed after the Saxons settled on our island, *Deor's Complaint* is the lamentation of a gleeman who had been supplanted at court by a rival. *The Fight of Finnesburg* tells of a struggle between sixty Danes and an army of Frisians. *The Battle of Brunanburh* describes the brilliant victory of King Athelstan over the Scots and Northmen of Ireland. *Byrhtnoth's Death*, or *The Battle of Malden*, gives an account of the Danish invasion of East Anglia. *The Ruin* represents a traveller mourning over a ruined city, probably Bath, which was overthrown in 577. *The Wanderer*, one of the most artistic of Saxon poems, is an exile's lament over his lost happiness and the sorrows of mankind. Of *Judith*, one of the best of the Christian poems, we possess only a fragment, relating the story of the banquet of Holofernes, his slaughter, and the attack on the Assyrian camp by the Jews. Other Christian and allegorical poems exist, such as the *Legends of St. Guthlac* and of *St. Andrew*, an allegory of *The Life of Christ*, and the fables of *The Whale* and *The Panther*.

All this early work is by unknown poets, but Caedmon, who composed *The Paraphrase*, our first Christian poem, in the seventh century, is probably a real personage, and so certainly is Cynewulf, the chief of Saxon poets, who lived in the eighth century and wrote *Riddles* and a sacred poem, *Christ*.

The possession of many of these works we owe to the diligence of some unknown monks, who carefully collected and copied them into two manuscript books, which exist to-day and are known as the *Exeter* and *Vercelli Books*, so called from the places in which they were discovered.

**Latin Works.**—In the history of the literature of every modern country of Europe, from the time when the first step towards civilisation was taken, down to the seventeenth century, learned men wrote in Latin, and generally considered it beneath their dignity to employ their native tongue.

The reason for this is not far to seek. Had the studious monks of the Saxon monasteries written in Saxon they could have had but few readers, for the great mass of the people could not read. But the learned men of every land understood the doggerel Latin of the Church and the few fragments of Latin authors which had penetrated the dark ages following the fall of Rome. Therefore every writer seeking for fame, or for the better instruction of the clergy, would write in Latin. Copies of his works would be sent to far-distant monastic libraries, and thus become known to scholars everywhere. The most noted of Latin writers in England was the Venerable Bede (seventh century), whose *History of the Anglo-Saxon Church* contained all that the world then knew of science, besides a record of the progress of Christianity in England. Aldhelm, Alcuin, Erigena, and Dunstan, as well as other bishops and archbishops, gained renown by their homilies, lives of saints, and curious verse.

**Saxon Prose.**—The earliest example of Saxon prose of which we have any knowledge was Bede's *Translation of the Gospel of St. John*, but to King Alfred belongs the honour of giving his people a prose literature.

His translations of Bede's *History of the Anglo-Saxon Church* and *The Pastoral of Gregory*, his rendering of universal history from Boëthius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, and the publication of his good laws were of the greatest value to his countrymen.

Other prose writers, notably Dunstan, Archbishop of

Canterbury, and Oswald, Bishop of Worcester, were instrumental in producing a series of sermons known as *The Blickling Homilies* (971). Alfric (eleventh century) was the author of an English-Latin grammar, a glossary, lives of saints, and some homilies, and Wulfstan, Archbishop of York (eleventh century), published an address to the people of England, in which he drew a terrible picture of the country after its devastation by the Danes.

But the prose writing which interests us most to-day is *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

Commenced by the monks in very early times, it was made by King Alfred a real narrative of events. It was continued after the king's death; by its abrupt end in 1154 the period of pure Saxon literature was brought to a close.

The life of the people was for the time crushed at the Norman Conquest, but happily not for ever. When next we take up the thread of the early writers we shall note a change in the language and the traces of foreign influences in the work, but also that the strong Saxon backbone ultimately prevails and dominates the literature, as it does the political life of the nation.

## ANGLO-SAXON POETRY AND POETS

*The Romance of Beowulf* (probably composed in the sixth century and put into writing in the seventh) is the most noted of early Saxon poems.

Its origin may be traced back to the beginning of the sixth century, when the Saxons, who lived on the shores of the Baltic, first heard the story of a famous battle fought against the Franks (a powerful people of Western Europe) by Hygelac, King of Sweden.

In this battle the Franks were the conquerors, but a vassal in the vanquished army, Beowulf by name, a man of great physical strength and courage, valiantly delivered the remainder of his people from destruction.

The deeds of this mighty warrior were celebrated in song, and, as is usual, were so enlarged upon that in course of time

the name of Beowulf signified a great fabulous hero, whose powers and miraculous acts are fully set out in this poem. The story tells of the wonderful history of his life, including two great episodes: his heroic struggle with the giant Grendel and his fight with a great sea-dragon.

The scene of the first part is laid in the island of Seeland.

Here Hrothgar, King of the Danes, has built himself a palace, and sits with his followers upon the mead-bench, feasting and enjoying the songs of the gleemen. His happiness is, however, spoilt by the visits of Grendel, a monster of the fens, who comes every night and carries off numbers of the sleeping thegns to his subterranean dwelling, whence they never return.

Terror seizes the court, and the palace is deserted till Beowulf comes to the rescue and goes to Grendel's dwelling, where, with superhuman strength and after a desperate struggle, he kills the monster.

The second great incident of the Romance takes place in Beowulf's own land, Gothland (probably on the coast of Sweden). He is an old man now, and performs the last great feat of his life, his victory over a terrible dragon who guards immense treasure in a cavern by the sea. He attacks the monster and kills him, but is himself mortally wounded in the combat. The unknown author of this poem has much poetic feeling; he gives us real pictures of the scenes he wishes to describe; his descriptions of the sea, and of Grendel's dwelling, are excellent; and he points a good moral. We see in Beowulf the kind of hero our forefathers admired—a man of great courage, ever ready to help his friends, liberal to his thegns, but barbarously cruel and revengeful.

It is interesting to note that England, the cradle of the world's great navigators, has in her first epic poem a story of the sea. We may also learn from Beowulf a great deal about the customs and manners of the time—the feasts, the towns, the ships and armaments of a people who lived in constant conflict with the sea and believed in wild places and caverns being inhabited by dreadful monsters. The



poem was first put into writing in the seventh century, and has come down to us in a manuscript, preserved in the British Museum, supposed to date from the year 1000.

The following is a translation of the lines describing Beowulf's death. (One of his followers has gathered together all the treasure found in the dragon's cave and brought it to the dying monarch):—

“Beowulf spake,  
As he gazed with grief upon the gold :  
'I thank with words the Ruler of all things,  
The King of Light, the everlasting Lord,  
For the hoard on which I here do look,  
That it was granted me to gain such riches  
For my dear people, ere my death-day came.  
I have now bought this hoard of jewels  
By laying down my aged life ; so grant  
Ye now the people's needs, for I may be  
Here no longer. Have the battle heroes  
Build a mound, gleaming after the burning,  
On a cliff by the shore. It shall, a memorial  
To my people, tower high on Hrones-nacs,  
So that seafarers seeing call it Beowulf's mount,  
Who drive afar their keels o'er the mists of the floods.'  
Then the dauntless king undid from his neck  
The glittering golden ring ; he gave to his thegn,  
The young spear hero, the gold-hued helmet,  
The collar and armour, and bade him use them well :  
'Thou art the last of our lineage, last  
Of the Waegmundings. Death hath driven  
All my kindred, the earls in their might,  
To their fate. I must follow them.'”

## EARLIEST CHRISTIAN POETS

**Caedmon (Seventh Century).**—The most noted of early Christian poets was Caedmon.

The Venerable Bede gives a beautiful account of the poet's life and work. He tells us that Caedmon was a poor and ignorant man living on some abbey lands near Whitby. Being entirely without the spirit of song, he was unable, when the harp was passed round after a feast, to contribute his

share to the entertainment. On one occasion, as his turn drew near, he slipped from the hall in shame, and went to sleep in an ox-stable.

Here he had a wonderful dream; he imagined himself singing beautiful poetry of the Creation and God's glory. On his awakening he remembered all that had passed through his mind, and going to Hilda, royal abbess of the monastery, he was able to recite to her the verses of his dream.

This convinced her that he had a command from God to teach the people. He was received into the monastery, instructed in sacred history, and eventually produced his great poems, the *Paraphrase of the Creation and other Parts of Early Bible History*.

The exact date of Caedmon's life is not known, but the *Paraphrase* is supposed to have been written between 650 and 680.

Other poets added to Caedmon's work; they wrote the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt and travelling towards the Promised Land, and also the life of Daniel; but Bede says, "None could compare with Caedmon; for they learned their art from men, but he was inspired by God."

The story of Caedmon's life is by some considered only a legend, but if a legend it is certainly a pretty one.

**Cynewulf (Eighth Century).** — Perhaps the greatest of Saxon poets, and the only one of whom we have any authentic knowledge, was born between 720 and 730 (some authorities place him in the eleventh century). He appears to have acquired a little learning at one of the monastic schools, for he was able to read Latin and attempted to write Latin verse. As a young man he was a gleeman, and the most popular singer of his day. To amuse the crowds of people who gathered around him in the many halls he visited in the course of his wanderings, he composed a great many Riddles in verse. These quaint poems show that he possessed the poet's nature; that he loved the country, the birds and wild animals, and that he had travelled and seen many things. Towards middle life trouble fell upon him, and his friends



and patrons deserted him. This brought him to melancholy and despair. He deeply repented the sins of his past life, and, entering a monastery, devoted himself to the service of God. The spirit of poetry followed him into his exile from the world, but, instead of writing Riddles, he composed sacred poems. In the *Christ* he tells, with deep religious feeling, of the birth, ascension, and second advent of the Saviour. He also wrote lives of the saints and the *Dream of the Holy Rood*, in which he records his own religious experiences.

#### WRITER IN LATIN

**Bede (673-735).**—By far the most distinguished writer of Anglo-Saxon times is the Venerable Bede.

Born at Yarrow in 673, he entered the monastery of Wearmouth when only seven years old, and was one of the first pupils of the great teacher, Benedict Biscop. The studies and devotions of his early years were followed by a long life of usefulness. At the age of eighteen he took deacon's orders, and ten years later was ordained priest. He had, however, no ambition for high honours in the Church. "It was always sweet to me," he says, "to learn, to teach, and to write"; and so, to study, to teaching, and writing learned books he devoted himself.

Surrounded by a devout band of faithful disciples, the great scholar spent every moment of his life in good works, his tender, loving disposition endearing him to all.

His school at Yarrow was made famous by his teaching, and the library which he had taken infinite pains to collect was one of the best of the age.

As a writer he produced in all forty-five works in the Latin tongue on every branch of learning known to his time. He wrote on theology, music, rhetoric, medicine, arithmetic, astronomy, grammar, and physics, and compiled a *History of the Saxon Church*.

At the time of his death he was engaged in translating the Gospel of St. John into the Saxon tongue.

One of his scholars has given, in a letter preserved to us, this pathetic account of his dying moments.

"There is still a chapter wanting," said the scribe, "and it is hard for thee to question thyself longer." "It is easily done," replied Bede, "take thy pen and write quickly." By sunset the last sentence was completed, and, uttering the words "All is finished now," the old master offered his last prayer to Heaven and died in the arms of a much-loved disciple.

Bede's *History of the Saxon Church* is our chief authority for the early history of the Anglo-Saxons. His Latin is simpler and purer than that of any other Saxon writer.

### ANGLO-SAXON PROSE WRITERS

**Alfred the Great** (849-901), "England's Darling," as he was called in the Middle Ages, well deserves the praise and respect of Englishmen; for no man in Saxon times did so much good for his countrymen.

Born in Wessex, a part of England which retained a little culture even after it was extinct in the North, he at a very early age was obliged to fight against the Danes for his crown. From *The Saxon Chronicle* we learn how, after many disasters, the enemy was at last defeated and peace and prosperity restored. The king was then free to devote the rest of his life to the advancement of his country.

In his efforts to educate his people he had enormous difficulties to contend with, for the devastations of the Danes had extinguished the little learning which had at one time existed. Very few of his subjects could read at all, and the priests and monks were so ignorant that many could not translate the Latin books they were supposed to teach.

Alfred's first thought was to start again the old schools and to get good teachers for them. He wanted everyone to learn to read, young and old alike; and those who were going to be priests were to be taught Latin as well. But there were in Alfred's time hardly any Saxon writings in existence, so that people could not learn much even if they could read

in their native tongue. The good king set to work to prepare sound translations of Latin works, in order that everyone might know something about science, history and the moral teaching of the ancient writers.

Thus Alfred became our first prose writer, undertaking in this self-imposed task an even more formidable work than the defeating of the Danes.

In early life he had had little time or opportunity for study ; it was not till he was middle-aged that he mastered the difficulties of Latin. The writing down, in comprehensible Saxon, the knowledge he had acquired himself, or obtained from his friend Asser, was a very difficult work. There were, in those days, many dialects in the land : often the king must have puzzled over the sentences he was writing in order to choose words which would be understood by all ; and when he had decided on the best language, he had to invent the spelling, for there were no dictionaries to turn to.

With amazing patience and courage Alfred toiled through many important writings, and succeeded in giving to the people intelligible and useful works. The first of his translations (or it would be truer to say adaptations, for the meaning of his author had often to be explained), was a *History of the World*, written in the fifth century by the Spanish presbyter Orosius. This work was much valued in Alfred's time, because it contained all that was then known of ancient history. To his translation Alfred prefixed a geographical introduction, giving a list of all the countries peopled by the Teutonic race, and an account of the travels of two Norwegian explorers, one of whom had journeyed as far as the White Sea. His second task was to translate Bede's *History of the Saxon Church*. The translation of Boëthius's *Consolation of Philosophy* followed. This work, written by one of the last of the Romans, contained philosophy and good moral teaching. It was very difficult, however, to put it into Anglo-Saxon. We are told that Alfred first got Asser to explain the Latin author to him, and that he then wrote his Saxon rendering as simply as he could, often changing the allusions

of Boëthius into examples which would be more easily understood by his countrymen.

*The Pastoral of Gregory* was another important work. It describes an ideal Christian pastor—how he should live, teach, and preserve a Christlike humility. This teaching was much needed in the Saxon Church, and copies of the work were sent to every bishop in the kingdom.

Alfred also edited and probably wrote in the great *Saxon Chronicle*, and drew up a code of laws for the better governing of the nation.

A translation of part of the Psalms was the last literary work of this *first and greatest of Saxon prose writers*. The words of his own translation of Boëthius have been truly applied to him: "This I can now especially say, that I have longed to live worthily so long as I lived, and, after my life, to leave my memory in good works to the men who were after me."

**Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.**—Nearly all the history we have to-day of these early times has come down to us in the Chronicle.

From a very early date it appears to have been the custom in the monasteries to keep a record of passing events.

At first the monks only wrote down the names of the bishops and kings, with the dates of their births and deaths. In course of time a few particulars of their lives were added. In the days of King Ethelwulf we notice a marked improvement; important events are noted, and the record is carried back to the seventh century.

The chronicler also paid the reigning monarch a compliment, giving him a wonderful genealogy, back through Woden to Noah and Adam. The homes of these early chroniclers were Winchester and Canterbury.

In Alfred's time, possibly by the king's own hand, the work of record was enlarged and greatly improved. The annals were carried back to B.C. 60, and much interesting matter added, chiefly from Bede's *History of the Saxon Church*.

The work went on very feebly after Alfred's death, though occasionally a little life is given to the writing by the appear-



ance of a poem telling of some great battle, such as *The Battle of Brunanburh*.

After the accession of Edward the Confessor, the writers of history worked with renewed vigour. In Abingdon, Worcester, and in the North, copies of the old annals were made, and the record of events brought up to 1056.

In later times an account of the Battle of Hastings is given, and Norman rule described down to 1154, when the chronicle abruptly closes, probably with the death of the last of the monks who could write Anglo-Saxon.

"These early records are the *first history of a Teutonic people* in their own language, the earliest and most venerable monument of English prose."

From *The Saxon Chronicle*—how King Alfred set to work to construct a navy :—

"Tha het Alfred cyng timbran lang scipu ongen tha æs-cas. tha wæron fulneah tuswa lange swa tha othru. sume hæfdon lx ara, sume ma. Tha wæron ægther ge swiftran ge unwealtran. ge lac hieran thonne tha othru. Næron nawther ne on Fresisc gescæpene. ne on Denisc. bute swa him selfum thuhte thæt hie nytwyr thoste beon meahten."

Then King Alfred gave orders to build long ships against the "æs-cas" (Danish galleys); those were well-nigh twice as long as the others; some had sixty oars, some more. Those were both swifter and steadier, and also higher than the others. They were not shaped either on the Frisic or Danish model, but as he himself considered that they might be most serviceable.

## II.

# FROM THE NORMAN CONQUEST TO CHAUCER

(1066-1360)

## EARLY OR TRANSITION ENGLISH

THE Norman Conquest is a very important event in the development of England.

The Normans were descended from the great savage seakings of the North, who had created terror wherever they went. They were of Teutonic race, like the Saxons and Danes, but their long sojourn in the beautiful province of Normandy had greatly changed their manner of life and natural character. They had adopted the language, the religion and many of the laws and customs of the French, and, being more eager to acquire knowledge than their French neighbours, had outstripped them in learning and culture. At the time of the Conquest they were a leading nation in the civilisation of the age. The Saxons, on the other hand, had suffered so much in their disastrous wars with the Danes that Saxon literature and learning had fallen into decay. The schools, which at one time had sent great teachers to France, had dwindled into seats of ignorance. Odericus Vitalis, a Saxon writer of the eleventh century, describes his countrymen as "a rustic and almost illiterate people." It is not, therefore, surprising to find that the superior Norman learning crushed for a time all Saxon literature. In the end we shall see the two nations uniting



to form one great English people ; but, for many years after the Conquest, there is little trace of the work of the Saxon in the writings of the time.

Among the changes made in England by the Normans, which tended to influence the literary life of the people, we may note—

1. The introduction of a new system of government, with a foreign king at its head and foreign nobles at court and scattered over the lands once occupied by Saxon earls.
2. Great changes in the monasteries and their schools ; the supplanting of the Saxon clergy and monks by Normans.
3. The introduction of a new language spoken at court and by the new nobility and clergy everywhere.
4. The production of a new literature in Latin and French.

**Changes in the Church.**—The Saxon clergy were so ignorant that William the Conqueror had some excuse, though it certainly was not his only reason, for taking their livings from them.

Lanfranc and Anselm, who left their churches in Normandy to work in England, were two of the most learned men of the day.

Lanfranc especially, as the first Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, brought about many changes in the Church. In the place of the Saxon clergy he put educated Normans, who knew nothing of the Saxon language, so that soon there were few priests left to talk to the people in their native tongue.

**Improvements in Education.**—The monasteries also were filled with Norman monks. The schools were enlarged and multiplied, and good teachers appointed to preside over them. The education of the clergy was, however, the main object of the schools ; other people in course of time acquired a smattering of knowledge, but in the centuries following the Conquest, as in the centuries before, learning was considered the sole property of the clergy.

All the learned works were produced in the monastery and read by those who had devoted themselves to the service of the Church. The great majority of the people were content

to gather scraps of history and learn the truths of their religion from the recitations of the minstrels and the Bible stories and legends of saints, acted before them in church, in our earliest form of the drama, the *Miracle Play*.

But, in spite of all these changes in the land, the Saxon tongue was not overthrown. The great and learned might speak French, but the mass of the people continued faithful to the Saxon language; and so, in the course of centuries, as the conquerors and conquered united into one nation, the old language, though altered in form, and receiving into it many foreign words, became the common language of king and noble, as well as of peasant, and gradually developed into the great English tongue, which now may be heard in so many different quarters of the world.

In the early years after the Conquest, however, this did not seem at all likely to come about. The poor oppressed Saxon continued to speak his own language, but scarcely any writing, either in poetry or prose, was produced, and few could read the old manuscripts which, happily, were preserved in the libraries of the monasteries.

This lack of Saxon literature was the cause of many changes in grammatical form and in vocabulary.

**The Growth of the English Language.**—The unlettered people spoke, as they do in every age, “regardless of grammar.” The Norman barons and clergy, who found it necessary to learn some Saxon in order to be able to talk with their tenants or parishioners, did not trouble to acquire difficult inflexions; and so, as there were no learned writers to enforce grammatical rules, or teachers to correct mistakes, the language lost its many prefixes and suffixes, and became uninflected. Besides these changes in form, the Normans introduced into their conversation many French words. These were chiefly connected with science, medicine, architecture, war, hunting, cookery, articles of dress and taste, in all of which the Saxon played but a small part. He took care of the pigs and sheep (Saxon words), the Norman ate the pork and mutton (French ones). It was the Norman architects

who designed the beautiful new churches, so architectural terms are French; and it was the Normans who studied science, therefore scientific terms are French or Latin.

In course of time these new words came into common use, and so, when, towards the middle of the fourteenth century, English took its place again as a written language, it was a different English from that of King Alfred's day, both in construction and vocabulary. These changes were, of course, gradual, and varied in different parts of the country. Thus, where Norman influence was strongest in the towns, the alteration was more marked than in the country districts, yet, gradually and surely, the language was changing throughout the Norman and Plantagenet reigns, and therefore this time is rightly called a *Transition Period*.

French long remained the fashionable language at court and with the nobles in their castles. Most of the early kings could speak nothing else, though we have evidence that Henry II. understood, even if he could not speak, English.

The English preaching of the Mendicant Friars, who did so much good in the thirteenth century, gave English renewed life in the Church. The loss of our French possessions in John's reign, and the uniting of the Norman and Saxon peoples in our first great protest for liberty—Magna Charta—made French unpopular, and it fell entirely into disuse, both as a written and spoken language, in Edward III.'s reign, when the king made war with France.

**Characteristics of the Literature of the Period.**—In turning to the productions of these years, we note that all the learned works were in Latin, and that the writers in Norman-French and English confined themselves to the lighter forms of literature—romantic stories in verse, love songs, and popular ballads. Latin writers devoted themselves to compiling chronicles, to writing works on theology and philosophy, and to composing allegorical poems.

Very soon after the Norman Conquest, Norman monks, inspired by an interest in the Saxon people, began to examine the old Saxon chronicles, and to found on them new annals

which should include the history of their own time. These annals, at first entirely written in verse, were a great improvement on the old manuscripts. The writers were generally intelligent men, who sympathised with the people and really knew—often perhaps had witnessed—the events they recorded.

William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon and Matthew of Paris deserve especially to be remembered. Their work is so good, both in style and narrative, that it almost deserves to rank as history.

The chronicles were at their best in the eleventh, twelfth, and beginning of the thirteenth centuries. After that time passing events were simply noted down in prose. No further historical work claims our notice until the reign of Henry VIII. Contemporary with these reliable Norman records are the works of several Celtic writers, who sought to impress the conquerors with the importance of the ancient Celt by writing wonderful stories of early British times, and calling them Histories of the Ancient Britons.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's History was particularly famous; his marvellous tales about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table were the source of much of the romantic poetry of this and succeeding periods.

**The Dawn of Scientific Knowledge.**—To the beginning of the twelfth century we can trace the dawn of scientific knowledge in England. Up to that time England, and most other European nations, had been supremely ignorant of the simplest facts of science, for all the great learning of those highly civilised peoples the Greeks and Romans had been overthrown by the barbarous Germanic tribes who conquered and laid waste Rome in the fifth century.

But, happily for us, these ancient peoples in their old country of Greece, and in the distant lands which had once been their colonies, retained much of the old learning, and possessed relics of past greatness in the valuable manuscripts of Greek and Latin writers, which were carefully preserved throughout the ages of ignorance in Europe known as the Dark Ages. In the centuries to come, these glorious works were, as we



shall see later on in our history, to find their way into the farthest corners of Europe. In the twelfth century it was but a few fragments of these riches in science, art, and literature which, in a very roundabout way, reached England.

There came into Spain during the eighth century a highly intelligent and great conquering Arab race, who had had intercourse with the Greeks and had obtained from them some very valuable works of science. This people soon made themselves masters of the Spanish peninsula, established a new order of government, and founded schools and libraries throughout the land.

Rumours of the wonderful new teaching in these schools spread slowly but surely through Europe, and students from all parts went to Spain to study the new learning introduced by these invaders, who are known in history as the Moors.

English monks were amongst the most eager of these studious travellers, and, through them, a little of the Greek knowledge of mathematics and philosophy found its way into England.

To the new universities founded at Oxford and Cambridge, and the monastic schools, crowds of young men flocked and enthusiastically devoted themselves to study.

The enthusiasm for learning in the early part of the twelfth century was not, however, lasting; students grew tired of patient, careful study, and, no longer zealous to acquire knowledge, split up into societies and wasted their lives in useless controversy.

Two rival schools of philosophy were started in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican monk, and Duns Scotus, a Franciscan friar; and their followers, under the titles of Thomists and Scotists, were involved, during the succeeding century, in vain and idle argument.

They had very little real scientific knowledge. In mathematics the great Greek Euclid's Geometry had been obtained from the Arabs, but many of the Schoolmen never got beyond the fifth proposition of Book I. Of arithmetic they knew very little, though our present system of numbers was borrowed

from the Arabs in the fourteenth century. A little astronomy was learnt, because people believed in the influence of the stars on their fate ; and much time was devoted to alchemy, which it was hoped would reveal untold marvels.

Poor and inefficient as this teaching was, it was better than the ignorance of preceding times, and we have in the one genius the period produced, Roger Bacon, proof that a purer work would come. This great student was one of the few learned men of his day who sought for true scientific knowledge by a study of real things and by experiment.

In his *Opus Majus* he proved that he was centuries in advance of his time by explaining that observation and experiment were the only true methods of scientific study. But he could find no one in the thirteenth century to believe in his theories. It was not till three hundred years had passed, and his great namesake—Francis Bacon—had set forth the same system more fully, that a new era in science commenced.

**Writers on Church Matters.**—The struggles between the Church and the king, which occupy such an important place in the history of these times, are reflected in the writings of learned Churchmen. Some, like John of Salisbury, (chief work *Polycraticus*), strongly upheld the power of the Church ; others, especially Walter Map and Robert Grosseteste, boldly attacked the vices of the clergy.

Such was the work of the Latin writers of the age. Absorbed in philosophy, history, and Church matters, they had little time or inclination for the lighter branches of literature.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a few prose stories, however, were written ; Walter Map composed some allegorical poems, and Joseph of Exeter wrote an epic on the Trojan War.

But for the greater part of the imaginative work we must turn to the Norman-French and English writers. Latin discussions appealed only to the Churchmen, whereas the great mass of the nation, from the lord in his castle to the humblest villein on his estate, sought amusement in romantic stories and love songs.



**French Romance.** — These were the days of chivalry and romance. In gorgeous apparel, with long retinues of servants, the kings and the barons held their courts, and revelled in the tournament and other fashionable court amusements. To these gatherings came the minstrels with many a pathetic love story and heroic tale; whilst the knights, and even one king, Richard I., entered the ranks of the poets and wrote love songs to the ladies they delighted to honour.

This *court literature*, as it is called, had its origin in the south of France, in Provence, where the French minstrel, known as the troubadour, learnt from the Arab the art of composing romantic verse to celebrate the great deeds of a popular hero or to express his admiration for the court dames.

This verse was entirely unlike the Saxon alliterative poetry. It was written in metre and rhyme, in the same manner as modern poetry, and was soft and musical to the ear.

The troubadours became famous throughout France (in the north of the country they were called *trouvères*) and soon travelled to England to fill the place in court and castle once occupied by the gleemen. When Henry Count of Anjou became Henry II. of England the influence of the troubadour reached its height, for his wife, Eleanor of Poitou, brought over in her train Bernart de Ventadorn, the greatest of all the troubadours.

Besides many love songs, heroic and romantic tales were sung about King Arthur and his knights, the great Emperor Charlemagne of famous memory, the Norman hero Roland, the Greek hero Alexander, and the English Richard Cœur de Lion; together with stories of the siege of Troy and such quaint legends as Tristan and Isolde, the romances of Guy of Warwick and the Anglo-Danish heroes, King Horn and Havelok. All this early work was in French, the best of it written in France, for the Norman in England produced but feeble French poetry, and Saxon writers, with the exception of the Saxon chroniclers, showed no sign of life till the beginning of the thirteenth century.

**English Romance and Lyrics.**—Layamon was the first Englishman after the Conquest to take up the strains of verse in the native tongue. He translated into English, in 1205, the *Brut d'Angleterre*, which the Norman writer Wace had founded on Geoffrey of Monmouth's stories of King Arthur.

Other Englishmen followed Layamon's example, and so, in course of time, the romances which had delighted the knight and his lady in their castle found their way among the simple common folk of the villages and towns. Legends, fables, and fairy tales were translated. Some poets adopted the French metre and rhyme, and used many French words; others wrote in almost pure Saxon, and employed the old alliterative measure, which remained popular among the country people long after the introduction of French verse.

In the fourteenth century a new and original kind of story-telling appeared in Robert of Gloucester's *Rhyming History of England*.

Laurence Minot, our first national song-writer, celebrated in martial lays the victories of Edward III., and another poet, whose name is unknown, writing about 1360, deserves specially to be remembered as author of the best and most original poems of the period. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* this unknown poet wrote a romance with true English feeling and described the scenery of his own country; in *The Pearl* he composed an elegy, imbued with grief and pathos, to the memory of his daughter; and in *Cleanness* and in *Patience* he preached morality and religion.

Creeds, paternosters, Bible stories, and lives of saints were put into verse by pious monks and friars for the instruction of the people. *The Ormulum* is probably the earliest of these religious poems; it is the work of a monk who lived about the same time as Layamon. Other examples are *The Handlyng Synne* (Handbook of Sins) of Robert Mannyng, and *The Pricke of Conscience* of Richard Rolle.

In such crude tales in verse as *The Land of Cokayne*, *The Lay of the Ash*, *The Debate of the Carpenter's Tools*, *The Song of the Husbandmen* certain unknown authors indulged in

broad jokes and primitive satire at the expense of the Church, the priests, and the monks. And no doubt many an old English ballad was composed in these days in honour of the real or imaginary outlaw Robin Hood, and at least one song of country life in *The Owl and the Nightingale*, thought to be the work of Nicholas Guildford (thirteenth century).

**English Prose.**—English prose scarcely existed. The years immediately succeeding the Conquest are broken only by the crude, mournful record of Saxon misery set down in *The Saxon Chronicle*.

“The Normans,” says the old chronicler, “remained here and wrought castles widely throughout the nation, and oppressed the poor people, and ever after that it greatly grew in evil. May the end be good when God will.”

Alfred’s sayings were compiled in English about 1200, and about the same time we note that charters were written in English. Bishop Poor, in the thirteenth century, wrote a treatise, *The Rule of the Anchoresses*, for the guidance of a little band of women who had withdrawn from the world to devote themselves to the service of God. A few homilies and sermons were the work of the good friars, and the Psalms were put into English prose in the second half of the thirteenth century by Richard Rolle; and again in 1327, by an anonymous writer, who may possibly have been William of Shoreham.

It is true that none of these quaint, crude writings find a place on our bookshelves to-day, but they are none the less of great interest. They laid the foundations of our great, expressive language, and put us on the road towards culture and learning.

The progress was slow, but every step was important in preparing the way for the great writers of succeeding ages.

## EARLY ENGLISH WRITERS

**Layamon** (1150?–1210?) was, as he tells us in his poem, a priest in the land, who dwelt at Eadmer in Worcestershire, on the banks of the Severn. Being deeply interested in the



wonderful stories of King Arthur and his people told by Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his *Chronicle*, and by Wace, in his *Brut d'Angleterre*, he thought how he should like to give these famous tales to the English in their own language.

He had to undertake a long journey to get copies of the books which were to be his models, for they were rare and highly prized. At length, however, he was successful, and, returning with the treasures to his quiet home, commenced his *Brut*, a metrical chronicle of England. Though principally a translation, Layamon introduced many old Welsh country stories unknown to Geoffrey of Monmouth and to Wace. The poem, finished in 1205, was very long, consisting of over 32,000 lines.

Living at such a great distance from the towns of Norman influence, we are not surprised to find that the poet followed very closely the rules of Saxon verse. The number of French words he made use of is only fifty in the whole poem. He, however, dropped many Saxon inflexions, and, though principally using Saxon alliterative measure, occasionally slipped into rhyme.

His work is one of the best poetical productions of the Middle Ages. It interests us chiefly to-day because Layamon is the first English poet after the Conquest, and the first to sing of King Arthur in English verse.

Extract from the account of a great battle at Bath, in which King Arthur defeats the Saxons:—

“Ther weoren Sæxisce men : folken alre ærmest	There were Saxon men of folks all most wretched,
And thá Alemainisce men : geo- merest alre leoden :	And the Alemannish men, saddest of all nations.
Arthur mid his sweorde : fæie-scipe wurhte :	Arthur with his sword death-work wrought :
Al that he smat to : hit was sone fordon :	All that he smote to it was soon done for—
Al waes the king abolgen swá bith the wilde bar.”	All was the king enraged as is the wild boar.

Among the long list of romantic and satirical poems produced during these years, for the most part by unknown

authors, *Havelok the Dane* is a characteristic example of the romances the people delighted to listen to; and *The Land of Cokayne* satirises, after the manner of the day, the love of pleasure and good living ascribed to the monks and clergy.

ROMANCE OF "HAVELOK THE DANE"  
(THIRTEENTH CENTURY)

The romance of *Havelok the Dane* is the history of the young orphan son of an ancient king of Denmark, who was left in the care of a wicked guardian named Earl Godard. This man conspires to take the young prince's life in order that he may seize the crown. He accordingly gives secret orders to a fisherman named Grim to take the young boy to sea and drown him.

Grim sails with his charge, but instead of drowning him takes him to the coast of Lincolnshire and lands at a place now called Grimsby. There the young heir of Denmark, quite unconscious of his royal birth, is brought up as a fisherman. In a time of famine he takes service as cook's boy in the household of the Count of Cornwall, where his great physical strength and his good nature bring him into popular favour. The Count of Cornwall is the guardian of the beautiful English Princess Goldburgh, whose father dying when she was very young had commended her to his care, with the command to marry her to the finest and strongest man he could find.

The father meant that this man should be of royal descent, for otherwise the princess would not be allowed to rule.

The Count, like Havelok's guardian, is unworthy of his trust, and, wishing to usurp the crown himself, resolves that her husband shall be the cook's boy, Havelok.

He attains his end, but soon afterwards a succession of events leads Havelok to the discovery that he is himself king.

All ends happily: the villains are duly punished, and the king and queen enjoy a long and glorious reign of sixty years, and are blessed with fifteen children, all of whom become either kings or queens.



## THE LAND OF COKAYNE (THIRTEENTH CENTURY)

*The Land of Cokayne* is a spirited attack on the luxury of the monks. The Land of Cokayne (or kitchen) is a wonderful region. Its rivers flow with oil, wine, milk, and honey. Its great abbey, the joyous abode of many fat monks, has walls of pasties, floors of cakes, and pinnacles of puddings. Over this wonderful country roasted geese fly about crying "Geese all hot!" and are eaten in great quantities by the greedy monks.

### III.

## THE AGE OF CHAUCER

(ABOUT 1360 TO 1474)

**I**T is pleasant to turn from the medley of writers in Latin, French, and English—the translators, imitators, doggerel rhymesters, and crude original workers—who illustrate the age of transition, to the one great genius who adorns the Middle Ages in England.

**First Great English Poet.**—In Chaucer we have reached a notable landmark in English literature; he is our first great poet, our only great poet before the age of Elizabeth. He towers over all his contemporaries and predecessors, like the stately oak over a plantation of shrubs.

We go to him to hear the first music of real poetry, to meet for the first time real human beings, men of high degree and common peasant folk, to enjoy the first breath of country air and smell the sweet fragrance of flowers, to bask in the sunshine and laughter of merry England, to wander through the labyrinth of fourteenth-century London, and talk the English he made the universal literary language of England.

**England in the Fourteenth Century.**—In his great masterpiece, the *Canterbury Tales*, we have our best and truest picture of our country in the fourteenth century; no longer a land of Norman and Saxon, but of Englishmen, proud of their country and anxious for her glory.

We see London, a very different London from the huge city of to-day. The "dere swete citee" Chaucer speaks of was a quaint, irregular little town of narrow streets and timber

houses, with projecting storeys and signs overhanging the way, much to the inconvenience of passers-by. Pigs, the favourite domestic animals, prowled about even the busiest thoroughfares and fattened on the refuse which was, too often, thrown into the street.

The Gothic church of St. Paul's stood on the ground now occupied by the cathedral; and one quaint bridge, lined with houses, crossed the river, and was the main road out of London on its south side.

The city was surrounded by walls pierced with gates, through which our poet would wander from his home in Thames Street for a country ramble in the fields and meadows beyond.

We learn that travelling was difficult in those days—for the roads were bad and robbers plentiful—and pilgrims, when they made their favourite visit to the shrine of St. Thomas-à-Becket, travelled in company for protection.

They performed their journeys on horseback, and, as they had few topics to discuss by the way, they beguiled the time by telling stories to each other.

We see them passing the night in a famous hostelry, sitting round the board on trestles which served as table, each dipping his fingers into the big dish in the middle; some keeping their hands very white and clean for this purpose, others considering such cleanly ideas affected.

We see that women were admired and respected, as they had not been in earlier times, that there were many hypocrites in the land, and much poverty and oppression.

We learn how many of the people dressed and passed their lives, and know something of their faults, vices, and their good traits of character.

Their language is English (if they drop into French it is the French of "Stratford atte Bowe"), and it is the English of the East Midland dialect, which thenceforth became the literary language of the nation.

**The English Language takes a Fixed Form.**—Dialects still continued to exist, as they do to this day in different parts

of the country; but succeeding authors adopted Chaucer's English—the language of London and the midland counties.

The lapse of time and foreign influences have brought about changes; but Chaucer's English is not greatly different from the language we speak to-day; with help from a glossary we can still read his works, whereas Anglo-Saxon writings are almost as difficult to decipher as a foreign tongue.

**Italian Renaissance.**—The beautiful and new order of literature given to our country by Chaucer, though in a great measure original, owes much of its grace of form to foreign, especially Italian, influence. Whilst England had been slowly building up a language, and gradually feeling her way towards literary culture, Italy had far outstripped the rest of Europe in learning and art.

The early Italian renaissance, as it is called, may be traced to the thirteenth century, when Italy was going through a turmoil of war in her struggle for freedom from despotic rule. Freedom from tyranny meant freedom to think, and the stirring historical events through which Italy passed are reflected in the literature of the period.

The Crusades, which developed commerce with foreign lands, the romantic poetry of the French troubadour, and the settlement of Greek learned men at Florence, making that little Republic a centre of art and learning, all helped on this great literary awakening. In 1265, at Florence, Italy's first great poet, Dante, was born. His sublime and powerful work, *The Divine Comedy*, ranks among the finest poems of the world, and has influenced the poets of many ages and many climes.

To him succeeded Petrarch, a great lyrical poet, and Boccaccio, whose chief work was the prose stories of *The Decameron*.

**First Influence of Italian Literature in England.**—Chaucer was the first English poet to come under the influence of this new Italian literature. He obtained some of his most delightful stories—perhaps even the general idea—of the *Canterbury Tales* from Boccaccio, and his metre was principally modelled on that of the Italian poets.



Nothing approaching his beautiful measures can be found in the rhymed doggerel or alliterative verse of preceding times.

He introduced two forms of verse from Italy—the deccasyllabic, called heroic metre; and the octosyllabic, known as rime royal. The former—a ten-lined measure, rhymed in couplets, each line containing five accentuated syllables—he used for the greater number of the *Canterbury Tales*; the latter—an eight-lined stanza, the first six lines rhyming alternately, the last two forming a rhyming couplet—he adopted for some of his poems, but reduced the number of lines to seven, retaining the couplet.

Chaucer represents, then, the beginning of a new era of literary life in England, and, although there was no one among his contemporaries able to follow worthily in his footsteps, his poetry had great influence on succeeding ages. He also represents England as she appeared to a learned, cultured man, who looked out on to the world through kindly and humorous spectacles.

**Langland and Wyclif cry for Reform in Church and State.**—But there was a sad and sombre side of the picture—a depth of misery, corruption, and oppression—which found voice in the verse of the poet of the people, William Langland, in his *Vision of Piers Plowman*, and in the powerful preaching of John Wyclif.

The vices and corruptions of the Church had been exposed and condemned by many writers, for centuries, but the preaching of the friars and their humble and worthy lives among the poor had helped the people to forget the extortions of the clergy. When, however, the friars became corrupt, and, though still pleading poverty, were growing wealthy and often leading wicked lives, the people turned against them and a cry for truth and purity of life spread through the land.

The mass of the population had indeed great cause for complaint. They were oppressed by the upper classes, and reduced to poverty and misery by the heavy taxes enforced to carry on the wars with France, and by the exactions of the clergy;



besides which they suffered constantly from the effects of the plague, which too often swept over the country, causing pain and terror everywhere.

Langland was the spokesman of the people. His pleadings for the cause of truth and righteousness in Church and State found an echo in the hearts of many who now turned for comfort to the teaching of a pure religion.

The thrilling, impassioned, satiric allegory, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, was unknown among the court poets; no writer of the day ever mentions its author, but it was nevertheless a power in England. The most unlettered could understand its simple language; copy after copy was made and read up and down the country.

*The Vision of Piers Plowman* stands by itself a solitary and powerful alliterative poem, written in Chaucer's English, but having no other kinship with the work of the father of English poetry.

**Minor Poets.**—Around the great name which dominates our period, however, we may group a few minor poets. The moral Gower (chief English work, *Confessio Amantis*—the confession of a lover—1393) was thought very highly of in the aristocratic circles of his day as a poet who could charm in Latin, French or English; modern readers, however, can find nothing but weariness in his verse.

The century that succeeded Chaucer was quite barren of real poetic genius. Thomas Occleve—in *The Governail of Princes* (1411), and John Lydgate—in *The Troye Book*, *The Temple of Glass*, and *Falls of Princes* (1438?), produced feeble imitations of the great poet whom they delighted to call "maister"; Sir T. Clanvowe wrote *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* and *Chaucer's Dream*; and some unknown poet, thought to be a woman—if so, our first poetess—wrote two graceful allegorical romances, *The Flower and the Leaf* and *The Assembly of Ladies* (about 1450). Minstrels and itinerant poets were as popular as ever, and travelled about with the old romances and ballads. They likewise made satirical verses on women and monks, war songs, lovers' serenades,

and related in rhyme all the gossip of the good and bad doings of the Government to the applause of the lords and ladies and their retinues, who feasted them and rewarded them with money and furred robes.

**Scottish Poets.**—But not one of these minor English writers has gained the poet's laurels. For better work we must cross the Tweed, to the lowlands of Scotland, where a nation existed who, although the mortal enemy of England, spoke the "Inglis" and read with enthusiasm Chaucer's beautiful verse. Its writers were not, however, merely imitative of the great poet; the ruling spirit of this early Scottish poetry is patriotism and freedom.

English writers, it is true, expressed the same sentiment, but it was in a less degree, for the English had not passed through so stirring and troublous a time as the Scotch.

Scotland, with such leaders as Bruce and Wallace, had fought for home and freedom against Edward I. and II. with a desperation which showed they would rather die than submit; and this patriotism is reflected in their literature.

The Scotch also showed a keen appreciation for the beauties of scenery long before the English had learnt to delight in the country. The imitators of Chaucer in the North would choose Italian stories for their poems, but they always placed their Italian heroes and heroines amidst the wild landscape of Scotland.

John Barbour, the first Scotch poet worthy of honour, appeared towards the close of the fourteenth century. He gave his country national songs and a long romance—*The Bruce*. The love of freedom is the keynote of his verse, as it is also of the greatest of the northern minstrels, Blind Harry.

Chaucer had but little influence on these two hardy Scotchmen, but he entirely dominated the verse of the romantic king-poet James I., whose romance, *The King's Quair*, 1422, is of pathetic interest.

Barbour and James I. were the precursors of a long line of Scottish poets who have contributed in no small measure to the glory of English literature.

**Prose.**—This age produced one great poet, but the art of writing clear, simple, attractive prose was still in its infancy.

**English Bible and Works on Theology.**—John Wyclif, the great reformer and founder of the sect called Lollards, stands first among the prose writers by his epoch-making work, the translation of the Bible.

Wyclif's Bible served as a model of prose writing to many who came after him.

His sermons and tracts on Church doctrine are also of importance. He was the first learned man to write on Church matters in English.

Bishop Pecock continued the religious controversy in the fifteenth century, and opposed the teaching of the Lollards in his treatise, *The Repression of Overmuch Blaming of the Clergy*. Sir John Fortescue wrote the first English Law-book.

In History the Latin chroniclers continue to set down passing events, but with none of the painstaking enthusiasm of their predecessors. The best account of the history of this age is obtained from the works of Froissart, a great French author.

A very wearisome treatise, *The Testament of Love*, is the work of one Thomas Usk, who wrote it in 1387; and John of Trevisa translated the Universal History of Ralph Higden from the Latin about the same date.

**Prose Romance.**—By far the most popular work of the age was the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, which appeared in England at the close of the fourteenth century. This picturesque geographical romance was long thought to be the genuine work of an English explorer, but it has been proved that Sir John was a purely imaginary personage, and that the English book is really the translation of the work of a French writer, Jean de Bourgoigne. The translation is in simple English, the work of an unknown hand.

The romance records the most wonderful and impossible stories of distant lands inhabited by fabulous monsters, weeping crocodiles and people whose heads grew between their shoulders.

Chaucer wrote two of the stories of the *Canterbury Tales* in prose; and an excellent prose story is the *Morte d'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory, which appeared in 1470, four years before that great populariser of literature, the printing press, was set up in England.

In the *Morte d'Arthur* the famous legend was told for the first time in prose, and in a prose that expressed the emotions of anger, terror, love, the fervour of battle, and the plaintive strains of melancholy in a far more attractive manner than had ever been done before. Malory discarded many of the wildest improbabilities of the story, but retained enough of the romantic fairy element to please his readers, who in those days believed in many wonderful things we now know to be impossible. His book is altogether one of the most delightful tales of chivalry. It is good to think that this, the first clever English prose story, was shortly after its production given to the nation in printed book form by that enterprising Englishman, himself a prose writer, William Caxton.

#### POETS

**Geoffrey Chaucer** (1340?-1400), "The Father of English Poetry," was born in London. His father was a wealthy vintner, much respected in the City. Having given his son a good education for those days, he placed him, at the age of sixteen, as page in the household of Lionel, Duke of Clarence. This proves that the family were honourably thought of, for such a post could only have been obtained for a lad of good breeding.

In 1359, Chaucer accompanied the English army to France, was taken prisoner, and, after a short sojourn in French prisons, ransomed by Edward III. On his return to England he rose in favour at court, and obtained the life-long friendship of John of Gaunt. He was entrusted with several important Government offices, and fulfilled his duties to the entire satisfaction of his royal master.

But, although never neglectful of his work, Chaucer loved study, and employed his leisure hours in poring over the works



of Latin and French authors. In 1368, he made his first essay in writing, composing a poem, the *Complaint to Pity*, on a sorrowful episode in his own life—his passion for a lady who did not return his love.

He must, however, have comforted himself for his loss ere long, for we find him some years later married to a maid-of-honour named Philippa, and father of a boy for whom he wrote a little book.

About the year 1370, he commenced a series of Continental travels as the king's ambassador. In this way he visited Flanders, traversed all France, and made the most important journey of his life—to Italy.

In this home of learning he spent some months, travelling to many places and visiting Florence and Genoa. Probably, on one of his journeys, he met the great Italian poet Petrarch, for he tells us in the *Canterbury Tales*—

“ I will tell you a tale, which that I  
Learn'd at Padova of a worthy clerk  
As proved by his wordes and his werk.  
He is now dead and nailed in his chest :  
I pray to God to give his soul good rest,  
Francis Petrarck, the laureat poet.”

Chaucer returned to England filled with enthusiasm for the Italian poets, and whilst conscientiously performing his duties as Controller of the Customs, a post he held for twelve years from 1374, devoted every spare moment to study or writing poetry.

When, in 1386, John of Gaunt fell into disgrace, the poet lost his appointments and was reduced to poverty. He continued, however, to write. The greatest work of his life was commenced during those years of adversity.

On the accession of Henry IV., the son of his old patron John of Gaunt, honours were heaped upon the poet. He was granted a pension for life, and we find him hiring a house in the garden of St. Mary's, Westminster, for the then considerable rent of £2 13s. 4d. a year.

He did not, however, live long to enjoy this return to



fortune. He died in the following year, and was buried in Westminster Abbey; the first of our poets to rest in the transept which has since become the sepulchre of so many English poets. The British Museum guards the only authentic portrait of Chaucer, painted soon after his death by his faithful follower Occleve. In it we see a kind, benevolent, thoughtful face, with aquiline nose and downcast eyes, forked beard, fair complexion, and a mischievous look about the mouth which tells of a sense of humour.

Of his habits of life we learn, from the poet himself, that he was of a retiring disposition, "was one that looked upon the ground as if he would find a hare." When his day's work was done he loved nothing so much as a quiet time with his books "studying and reading alway." Yet he was no hermit, and could enter into the joys and sorrows of his friends, was a welcome guest at court, was fond of mirth and good living, and as he grew towards age was portly of waist.

"He in the waist is shapen as well as I," says mine host of the "Tabard," himself a man of large proportions.

Of Chaucer's character we know from his works that he was gentle, courteous, kind of heart, and thoughtful for others; humorous and gay, but never unkindly satirical; brave in misfortune, and honestly performing his duty.

He never sneers at the weaknesses of people, though he exposes folly and attacks vice. His moral teaching is good, and he ever shows a chivalrous respect for women. He possessed a love for nature very unusual in his time, and tells us how he could spend a whole day in the fields absorbed in the simple beauty of the daisy. He is the first English poet to revel in the beauty of the fields, streams, flowers, and singing of the birds.

But greater than all his other attributes is his knowledge of human nature. His characters are entirely different from the impossible unreal heroes or villains of early English poetry. They are really human beings, whose lives we can enter into and appreciate.

The works of Chaucer may be conveniently arranged in three groups, though we cannot separate them by any fixed line. All show the genius of the poet in his knowledge of human nature and his power of expressing beautiful conceptions in majestic verse. With Chaucer, as with most other great men, his genius gradually developed. His earlier poems took the form of translations; his greatest original works were the product of later life.

The *first period* includes all that he wrote before 1372.

During these years he was an ardent admirer of the courtly poets of France. His earliest poem was a translation of a long popular French allegory, the *Roman de la Rose*. This very wearisome poem was at that time considered a masterpiece of literature; it was therefore quite natural that Chaucer should wish to put it into English. Whether he finished his task we do not know, as it is now thought that the greater part of the translation in existence to-day is the work of another hand. Other poems of this period are *The Complaint to Pity*, about 1366—interesting as a record of an episode in the poet's life and the first example of the new seven-lined stanza called rime royal—and *The Book of the Duchess*, written about 1369, in memory of Blanche, first wife of John of Gaunt.

The *second period* carries us to about 1385. It covers the years of Chaucer's travels in Italy; his studies of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, and the old Latin classics, whose influence may be seen in his work.

*The Complaint of Mars*, a humorous poem, and *The Parliament of Fowls* were written about 1380. *Troilus and Cressida* (1382) is a beautiful but sad love poem, founded on a story by Boccaccio. *The House of Fame* (1383-4) is, like *Troilus and Cressida*, thoroughly English in tone; it shows Chaucer no longer a mere imitator, but a great original poet.

*The Legend of Good Women*, 1385—in which Chaucer employed for the first time the heroic couplet—consists of a prologue and ten stories of virtuous women. In this great

poem about women the poet adopts the daisy as his flower, and invents a pretty legend of Alcestris, who was transformed into a daisy. It is probable that several of the stories used in the *Canterbury Tales* were written during these years, notably *The Rime of Sir Thopas*, *The Life of St. Cecilia*, *The Story of Griselda*, and *The Story of Constance*.

The *third period* comprises his great masterpiece, the *Canterbury Tales*.

After a long study of Italian models, Chaucer had created a new and original form of expression. In the *Canterbury Tales* he applied this new metre to a thoroughly English subject. He may have obtained the general idea of his work from the *Decameron* of Boccaccio, and many of the stories may be traced to foreign sources; but in the whole conception of the poem, and in the marvellous power of presenting characters, we see only the genius of Chaucer.

It was, probably, about the year 1386 that he conceived the idea of bringing together a number of persons of all ranks and classes, and putting into their mouths Italian legends, romances of chivalry, travellers' tales, ballads, and every kind of story likely to give variety to his picture. He lived only long enough to perform a quarter of his proposed work. In the Prologue, happily completed, we are introduced to a company of pilgrims bound for the tomb of St. Thomas à Becket, at Canterbury. They have come together, quite by chance, on the eve of their departure at the Tabard Inn, Southwark. This hostelry was long a noted starting-point for pilgrimages, and existed, though in an altered form, till within a few years of the present time.

In the chief room of the inn the portly host makes merry with his guests, as he presides over the good supper he has supplied for them. The party, some thirty in all, is a varied and most interesting one. It includes a knight, who has seen much of fighting, and is a worthy man, loving "truth, honour, freedom, and courtesy"; a prioress of affected manners, proud of her French, learnt "after the scole of Stratford atte Bowe"; a monk, "a lord built fat and in good



point," fond of hunting and enjoying himself; a friar, very rich in this world's goods, so good at begging from house to house that "though a widow hadde but one shoe" he could persuade her to give him something; a clerk of Oxford, a poor and worthy man, devoted to his books and not caring for riches; a cook; a sailor; a wife of Bath, a terrible gossip and shrew, who had had five husbands and now wanted a sixth, though getting on in life and "somewhat deaf"; a poor town parson, rich only in learning and work, a good man who taught "Cristes lore" and followed it himself; an honest, hardworking ploughman; a coarse and burly miller, of by no means prepossessing appearance, with a red beard and a wart on the end of his nose; a gentle pardoner, who had come straight from the Court of Rome to sell pardons from the Pope; and Chaucer himself, of elvish countenance and quiet manners.

It is a very mixed company, but the good host, "a large man much respected in the city, bold of his speech and wise and well y taught," makes them all happy with his good cheer; and, after supper, suggests that, as they have a long journey before them, it would be well for them to enliven the way by story-telling. He proposes that each member of the party shall tell two tales on the road to Canterbury and two more on their homeward way; the relater of the best story to be rewarded with a supper at the general cost. He offers himself as guide and judge, declaring that whoever disputes his decision shall pay for all that is spent on the road.

The company accept the proposal "with full glad heart," pledge each other once more in good wine and go to rest "withouten any longer tarrying." Next morning at dawn the pilgrims mount their horses and ride out of the city, by way of the Hospital of St. Thomas, in Southwark.

Then lots are cast to decide who shall tell the first tale, and, chance falling on the knight, he commences with the story of *Palamon the Arcite*; then the miller, who is drunk, insists upon coming in out of his turn and telling his story. So the poem runs on till twenty-five tales are told, many of exquisite

beauty, a few coarse and characteristic of the people who tell them. Two stories are in prose.

We do not know who won the supper, for our poet died before his pilgrims reached Canterbury, but enough of the poem was completed to make Chaucer the greatest name in our literature until Shakespeare be reached.

From the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* (with the original spelling):—

THE POOR PARSON

“ A good man was ther of religioun,  
And was a povre Persoun of a toun ;  
But riche he was of holy thought and werk.  
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,  
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche ;  
His parisshe devoutly wolde he teche.  
Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,  
And in adversitee ful pacient ;  
And swich he was y-preved ofte sythes.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyd was his parisshe and houses fer a-sonder,  
But he ne laste nat, for reyn ne thonder,  
In sicknes nor in meschief, to visyte  
The ferreste in his parisshe, muche and lyte,<sup>2</sup>  
Up-on his feet, and in his hand a staf.  
This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,<sup>3</sup>  
That first he wroghte and afterward he taughte ;  
Out of the gospel he tho<sup>4</sup> wordes caughte ;  
And this figure he added eek<sup>5</sup> ther-to,  
That if gold ruste, what shal iren do ?

\* \* \* \* \*

He was a shepherde and no mercenarie,  
And though he holy were and vertuous,  
He was to sinful man nat despitous  
Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne.<sup>6</sup>  
But in his teching discreet and benigne.  
To drawen folk to heven by fairnesse  
By good ensample was his bisnesse :

<sup>1</sup> Oftentimes.

<sup>2</sup> Great and small.

<sup>3</sup> Gave.

<sup>4</sup> Those.

<sup>5</sup> Also.

<sup>6</sup> Scornful.



But if were any persone obstinat,  
What-so he were, of heigh or lowe estat,  
Him wolde he snibben<sup>1</sup> sharply for the nones.<sup>2</sup>  
A bettre preest, I trowe that no wher noon is,  
He wayted after no pompe and reverence,  
Ne maked him a spyced conscience,  
But Cristes lore, and his apostles twelve,  
He taughte, and first he folwed it himselve."

**William Langland** or **William of Langley** (1330?-1400?), a mysterious visionary personage, who stands forth, in his thrilling poem of the poor, as the first writer in English literature to lay bare the miseries and oppression of the people and plead for them the cause of truth and justice. Of his life very little is known. He lived unknown and uncared for among the lower classes of town and country, quite unconscious that the poem into which he put the whole impassioned work of his life would leave so great a mark on the literature of his country that students in the nineteenth century would be anxious to know the history of its author.

What little is known of this poet is gathered chiefly from his work. He was born at Cleobury Mortimer, in Shropshire, of humble parentage, and sent to the monastery of Malvern to be prepared for the Church.

He appears to have lost his dearest relations in the plague of 1349, and to have come up to London, without taking Holy Orders, to gain, by singing at St. Paul's church, a livelihood for himself, his wife Kit and his daughter Nicolette. He describes himself as a tall man nicknamed Long Will, one loth to reverence lords or ladies, or persons dressed in fur and wearing silver ornaments. We can picture him a man of the people, despising riches, living unseen in his little house in Cornhill.

In 1362, he began his poem *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, writing probably in London, though living in imagination among his much-loved Malvern Hills. It is thought that he returned to his native county before the close of the century, but the time and place of his death are unrecorded.

<sup>1</sup> Reprove.

<sup>2</sup> For the occasion.

The first part of *Piers Plowman* appears to have been written in 1362. Langland re-wrote the poem in 1377, and revised it between 1392-9 and added new work entitled *Do Well, Do Better, Do Best*. Numerous copies of the work must have been made, for no less than forty-five MS. copies exist to-day.

In the poem the author imagines himself falling asleep on the Malvern Hills, on a fine morning in May, and dreaming a series of twenty dreams. In these visions he sees a field crowded with people, representing the world and its many temptations. All is sadness, wickedness, and hypocrisy in this large assembly, and the poet looks on in despair, till the appearance of the unlettered, simple-minded hero of the poem strikes a note of hope. The mysterious Plowman is a poet reformer, who leads the repentant sinners to the shrine of Divine Truth.

In *Do Well, Do Better, Do Best* the struggle to overcome sin is continued; Piers Plowman has become Christ Himself, labouring among sinful men. In the second part of the poem one magnificent scene—the Harrowing of Hell—makes Langland a worthy forerunner of Milton.

The poem closes in sadness and melancholy: life, with all its disappointments and anguish, appears to the sleeper. He awakens weeping as Conscience starts on a hopeless pilgrimage in search of the lost Divine leader.

The whole series of allegories abounds in wonderful pictures of the life of the poor. The poet's motto—Truth—compels him to paint England as it appears to him—the rich, with their greed and cruelty; the poor, in their oppressed condition. He shows the social and political life as he saw it from the lowest ranks, and gives the only contemporary record of the work of Parliament towards justice for all.

In his verse Langland cared nothing for the new foreign metres; he belonged to the old school of poetry, and wrote for the common people in the common metre of Saxon times. *The Vision of Piers Plowman* is an important link between Saxon and Chaucerian literature. The language is the English of the Midland dialect of the fourteenth century; the metre,

the alliterative measure of the Saxon poets. It is the last alliterative verse we shall have cause to mention, and by far the greatest poem written in that measure.

From *The Vision of Piers Plowman* :—

“Bote in a *May Morwening*  
 On *Malvern hills*  
 Me be*Fel* a *Ferly*<sup>1</sup>  
 Of *Fairy* me thought.  
 I was *Weary* for-*Wandered*<sup>2</sup>  
 And *Went* me to rest  
 Under a *Broad Bank*  
 By a *Burn’s* side,  
 And as I *Lay* and *Leaned*  
 And *Looked* on the waters  
 I *Slumbered* in a *Sleeping*  
 It *Swayed* so *mury*.”<sup>3</sup>

#### PROSE WRITERS

**John Wyclif** (1324–1384) was born at Hipswell, near Richmond in Yorkshire, and was probably descended from a good county family. He went to the University of Oxford, and distinguished himself there as a scholar and teacher. In 1360, he was made master of Balliol College, but resigned his mastership on being appointed Rector of Fylingham in Lincolnshire, which post he resigned later on to take a living in Buckinghamshire. Like the author of *Piers Plowman*, Wyclif realised all the abuses and corruptions of the Church, and boldly and steadfastly denounced them, preaching ever for reform. This made him very unpopular with bishops and clergy, and he was summoned more than once to appear before the Ecclesiastical Court. His good friend John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, stood by him on these occasions, and Wyclif escaped unpunished to continue his work. At first his preaching had been only against Church abuses, but a study of the Bible led him to denounce some Church doctrines and declare that the Pope had no authority to give absolution, penance, or indulgences. He gathered around

<sup>1</sup> Wonder.

<sup>2</sup> Worn out with wandering.

<sup>3</sup> Sounded pleasant.

him a little band of worthy friends, who went about the country teaching the people and exhorting them to fear God and lead good lives. The new teaching gradually spread, and the followers of Wyclif received the nickname of Lollards.

To answer for his heresy, the preacher was summoned before the Chancellor of Oxford and expelled from the University. The Pope likewise ordered him to repair to Rome, but he declined to go. The last years of his life were spent quietly at work in his rectory at Lutterworth, where he died from paralysis.

Of his personal appearance we know little, except that he was thin and worn-looking, and had a charm of manner which endeared him to all with whom he came in contact. *The translation of the Bible* is the work for which he is renowned in literature.

In 1360, when Wyclif commenced his enormous task, the only part of the Bible done into English was the Psalms; yet, during the next twenty years, the reformer and his helpers completed a translation of the whole of the Old and New Testaments, which, besides giving the people the opportunity of studying Scripture themselves, gave to our language one of its earliest examples of vigorous prose. Wyclif's other writings consisted of religious tracts in English and in Latin.

From Wyclif's Bible (Luke xxiv.) :—

“And lo tweyne of hem wenten on that day into a castel, that was fro Jerusalem the space of sixty furlongis, by name Emaws. And thei spoken to-gidre of alle these thingis that hadden bifalle. And it was don the while thei talkiden, and soughten by hemsilf: Jesus himsilf neighede and went with hem. But her y ghen weren holdun, that they knewen him not. And he seide to hem, what ben these wordis that ye speken to-gidere wondringe: and ye ben sorewful?”



#### IV.

## FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF PRINTING TO THE REIGN OF ELIZABETH

(1474-1558)

### THE RENAISSANCE

WE now enter upon an age of great discoveries, a period of new learning, new ideas, and gradual development in literature and culture.

We pass through the outer gateway of the Middle Ages into a new world, in which there is much that is good and beautiful to learn and assimilate before English literature shall be enriched by a flood of original genius.

In this new world of thought and learning we note first the Invention of Printing. In times previous to this great discovery, when every copy of an author's works was made with the pen, scholars had difficulties innumerable to encounter in order to satisfy their thirst for knowledge, whilst to a large mass of the population books were unattainable luxuries. It is true that by the fourteenth century the art of writing had reached marvellous perfection among the monks and scribes who gained a livelihood by copying manuscripts. The number of volumes so produced had vastly increased since the days of Alfred and Bede, but the cost of the smallest volume was still so great that only the richest in the land could afford to purchase a single book.

The price asked in Paris, in the early part of the fifteenth century, for a Latin Bible was five hundred crowns, equal to about twelve hundred and fifty pounds at the present day. When, therefore, in 1455, neatly-bound, red-lettered copies of the Scriptures were offered for sale at sixty crowns, people thought that the man who produced them must be in league with the devil, for by no ordinary means could he afford to sell them so cheaply. John Faustus, or Fust, was, however, quite guiltless of such evil practices. In a little workshop in Strasburg, he and his colleague Gutenberg were producing, by their wonderful printing process, more volumes in a year than the most hard-working writer could make in a lifetime. How Gutenberg had obtained the original idea from the Dutchman Laurence Costa, and how these early printers developed and kept secret the art is a long story.

Eventually, however, other printing-presses were started, and in 1474 the enterprising London merchant, William Caxton, set up the first printing-press in England, in the Almonry at Westminster.

It was a very different press from the magnificent machinery of to-day. The intelligent, industrious merchant and his little band of workmen were beset with innumerable difficulties: their little wooden press was very apt to get out of order, and there was no one to call in to repair it; they had to make their own ink, and to do their own binding, publishing, and bookselling.

But Caxton's enterprise opened a new era of knowledge in England. Books, though still expensive as compared with the prices of to-day, increased and multiplied as they had never done before; and reading, in the course of time, ceased to be the sole privilege of the Churchmen and the very rich.

**Renaissance in Learning.**—Following on this new method of making books came the discovery of a new literature and a great revival of learning.

We have already noticed the beginning of the Renaissance in Italy, and its influence on Chaucer.

In the fifteenth century, Italian literature and art received

new vigour and new ideas from the Greeks, who, driven out of their own land by the Turks, came to Italy, bringing with them the glorious literature which had been preserved from the great days of Greek and Latin civilisation. These ancient works were an enormous gift to the semi-civilised people of the Middle Ages, hitherto content with the superficial Latin of the Church and the scraps of Greek philosophy learnt from the Arabs.

It was as if some two thousand years hence, supposing England should have disappeared as a nation, and only a few descendants of the English remained to speak the language and know by tradition the glories of their ancestors, some new race, with little literature of their own, should suddenly light upon an old English library. Can we not imagine how eagerly they would ask the English-speaking men to teach them English, and how they would study Shakespeare, and try to understand all the books they had discovered?

The old Greek and Latin manuscripts were a new order of literature to the nations of Western Europe, and, through the lately discovered printing process, copies of them were obtainable in every country.

In England, however, little advance was made in learning before the reign of Henry VII. The civil Wars of the Roses had created grievous disorder throughout the land, and made study and improvement impossible. Caxton and his successors, by publishing editions of old authors, had kept alive the love for poetry and the early examples of prose; but it was not till law and order were established by Henry VII. that Englishmen were able to take an interest in, and profit by, the work going on abroad.

**England Prosperous.**—The reign of Henry VII. was the commencement of a time of prosperity for England. The feudal lords and their kingly castles had disappeared, and a new middle class was arising, by commerce and improved methods of agriculture, to wealth and power.

English students went to study in Italy, and returned home enthusiastic workers for the cause of learning. They sought

to convince their countrymen of the wonders of Greek and Latin literature, and would dwell long and lovingly on the works of the great Italian artists—Michael Angelo and Raphael—whose sculpture and paintings have attracted the admiration of us all.

Then, in 1492, came the discovery of America, opening up a new and entirely unknown world to the ever adventurous Englishman. All these things combined to bring about a great thirst for knowledge. Diligent students crowded the Universities and schools, and even women, whose education had never been considered in bygone days, worked hard at their Latin and Greek in order that they might be able to read the beautiful poetry and philosophy of the ancients. Lady Jane Grey was renowned as a scholar, and Queen Elizabeth devoted much of her time to reading the classics with her old tutor, even after she became Queen.

**Leaders in the New Learning.**—Warham, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury; Dean Colet, the founder of St Paul's School; William Lyly, its first headmaster; Bishop Fisher, of Rochester; Sir Thomas More; William Grocyn; and Thomas Linacre were the earliest leaders of the new movement in England.

Grocyn and Linacre, who had both studied in Italy, commenced teaching Greek at Oxford, at a time when there were no Greek grammars or dictionaries to guide them, and when many people looked upon its introduction with an unfriendly eye.

Before the close of Henry VII.'s reign, Erasmus, the greatest scholar of the age, visited England. This talented Dutchman landed on our shores in 1497, and was deeply impressed by the earnestness and studiousness which prevailed among English scholars. "The men," he writes in one of his delightful letters, "are sensible and intelligent. Many of them are even learned, and not superficially either. . . . The number of young men who are studying ancient literature here is astounding."

Henry VIII., in the early years of his reign, did much to



encourage learning, though we can never forgive the tyranny of his later years, which brought to the block some of the greatest scholars of the day. In his youth, he invited to England many great foreign scholars, including Erasmus, and placed learned Englishmen in high places.

Cardinal Wolsey seconded the work of his royal master by giving liberal donations to the Universities and by helping, with his money and influence, in founding grammar schools.

**Influence of Reformation on Literature.**—The closing years of this reign and the whole of Edward VI.'s and Mary's are filled with the stirring events of the Reformation. In the violent controversies and the persistent persecutions of the time, Greek and Latin literature were little heeded, yet the influence of this vast religious awakening on English writers is of the greatest importance. The Reformation was largely instrumental in creating an attractive prose literature. It produced scholars who discarded the stiff cumbrous sentences of early prose writers and wrote, for the first time in our history, clear, intelligible English. For this reason we give the prose authors of this period precedence.

**Prose.**—Most great scholars still wrote in Latin, the universal language of the learned; but under Henry VIII. we note a marked progress in English writings.

Caxton, in his *History of Troy* and *The Game and Play of Chess*, and Malory, in his *Morte d'Arthur*, had already taken the first steps towards an easy and simple prose style; Lord Berners and Sir Thomas More advanced much farther on the road. Lord Berners' translations of Froissart's splendid "Chroniques" and of a French romance called *Huon de Bordeaux* are good examples of picturesque prose; and Sir Thomas More's *Life and Reign of Edward the Fifth* may be regarded as our first genuine history. His *Utopia*, put into English in the reign of Edward VI., was also a valuable contribution to English prose.

The *Translation of the Bible* is, however, by far the greatest achievement of these years.

The language had so changed since Wyclif's day that his in

many ways imperfect version was obsolete. William Tyndale commenced the great work of an entirely new translation, and finished the New Testament in 1525. To this he was afterwards able to add a part of the Old Testament. Miles Coverdale revised and finished the work, which was admitted into England in 1536. In 1540, a new edition, the work of Cranmer, was published, and a copy placed in every church. This translation of the Bible fixed our language for all time. It travelled to the remotest villages in England. Chained to the desk in the village church, perhaps the only English book in the parish, the country folk read and re-read its glorious pages; and when the Pilgrim Fathers left their homes for the unknown, far-distant land of America, they carried their Bible with them, and remained faithful to the English of Tyndale and Cranmer in their adopted country.

The compilation of the Prayer Book under Cranmer's guidance, in 1549, was another fruit of the Reformation; and the sermons and tracts of Cranmer, Fisher, Latimer, Ridley and other divines did also good work for English prose.

Outside the religious movement, Roger Ascham sought to set an example of pure English writing; in his book on Archery, written in 1545, he says, "Everything has been done excellently well in Greek and Latin, but in the English tongue so meanly that no man can do worse." He exhorts English writers to keep the language pure by avoiding the use of Latin, French or Italian words.

Thomas Wilson laid down the same principles in his elaborate critical work—*The Art of Rhetoric* (1553)—and Webster Puttenham, whose *Art of English Poetry* was not published till after Elizabeth's accession, makes a similar protest against foreign words.

Among other prose writers, Sir Thomas Elyot wrote a work on education called *The Governor*, besides numerous translations of Greek authors and a book of advice as to the best way to live healthily, called *The Castle of Health*.

John Leland, the first English writer on Antiquarian

subjects, wrote *The King's Antiquary*, and George Cavendish wrote a *Life of Wolsey*.

Scotland produced her first noteworthy prose writer, John Bellenden, who, in 1536, translated Boece's *History of Scotland* from the Latin. And John Knox (1505-1572), who figures as writer as well as reformer, left his country another example of prose in his *History of the Scotch Reformation*.

In **Poetry**, this is an age of transition, unmarked by any great genius. The latter part of the fifteenth century was, in England, particularly barren of poetical productions. Under Henry VII. and Henry VIII. work of some interest was produced, partly imitative of Chaucer and partly influenced by the classical learning. This revived interest in poetry brought forth, on the eve of the Elizabethan era, an entirely new order of verse.

**Ballads.**—The most interesting event in poetry at the end of the fifteenth century was the publishing of a collection of English and Scotch ballads.

The ballad had, as we have already noted, been established in popularity for centuries. At fairs, merry-makings and May Day rejoicings, country and town folk alike loved to hear told in verse the stories of the famous Robin Hood, the battles of Otterburn and Chevy Chase, the Nut Brown Maid, besides a thousand other legends. Even in the fields or in their houses the peasants had some quaint song to sing whilst they worked.

In earlier times these ballads were learned by heart; many were never written down; but, after the introduction of printing, much of the old verse and a good deal of new was printed on leaflets and carried round the country by pedlars, who, like Shakespeare's Autolycus in the *Winter's Tale*, had "songs for man or woman of all sizes."

This printed verse was much admired and carefully treasured, for many country folk were like the village girl who came to Autolycus—they loved a ballad to be in print, for then they were sure that it was true. It was the custom in many country villages to cover the walls of the houses with these printed



sheets, so that everyone might have an opportunity of reading them, and even as late as the eighteenth century the walls of country inns were covered with old ballads. The first collection of these songs of the people, in book form, was made by Wynken de Worde, the printer who succeeded Caxton at Westminster. In the hands of the printer much of the original charm of the verse was lost, but enough remained to establish the ballad of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as an interesting, quaint, musical contribution to English lyrics.

Under Henry VII. and Henry VIII. three poets of talent flourished, in Stephen Hawes, Alexander Barclay, and John Skelton.

The two first-named are chiefly imitative of the poets of mediæval times; Skelton, a very popular poet in his age, is a more interesting figure. He wrote a great quantity of verse on a variety of subjects. His short-line poems are oftentimes delightful lyrics, and his satires on Wolsey—*Why come ye not to Court?*—and on the corruptions of the Church—*Colin Clout*—though coarse, are full of life and vigour.

In *The Court of Love*, printed and written about 1540, an unknown poet sought to write a poem in the earlier manner of Chaucer. He evidently loved the times that were past, and wished to revive the old form and style of the Middle Ages.

In Scotland, William Dunbar is the presiding genius in poetry, and a far greater man than any of his English contemporaries. A great imagination, originality, patriotism, and feeling for Nature pervade his chief poems, *The Thistle and the Rose*, *The Golden Lyre*, and *The Dance of the Deadly Sins*. Gavin Douglas, noted for his translation of the *Æneid*, 1512, and Sir David Lyndsay, the poet of the Reformation, bring to a close the first period of Scottish poetry.

In England, at the end of Henry VIII.'s reign, we see the first signs of the dawn of a great era in poetry.

**First Writers of Sonnets and Blank Verse.**—A group of poets, among whom Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, were the leaders, started an entirely new school of verse. They were our first writers of sonnets, a



form of poetry—chiefly love songs—much used in Italy ; and the Earl of Surrey was the first English poet to use a ten-syllabled unrhymed metre called blank verse. The Italians had already adopted it from Latin and Greek models, but Surrey's translation of two books of the *Æneid* is the first English example. "These sweet and stately measures," says a great writer, "were new in England ; they gave a smoothness and sweetness to English verse."

This metre was adopted and perfected by the great succeeding poets ; the most magnificent poetry in the English language is written in blank verse.

The poetry of Surrey, Wyatt, and their contemporaries was collected and printed, in 1557, under the title of *Tottel's Miscellany*. This volume is the first printed work of modern English poetry, and forms a worthy introduction to the great period of Elizabethan literature.

## BEGINNING OF THE DRAMA

### OUR EARLIEST PLAYS

To trace the history of the drama in England we must go back to the beginning of the twelfth century—to early Norman times—when the great mass of the people were ignorant even of the simplest religious truths. The services of the Church were in Latin, and therefore could not be understood ; and so, in order to teach the people, the clergy would sometimes, instead of reading the Lessons for the day, act to their congregations a Bible story or the life of some great saint.

On the Continent these crude forms of acting were called *Mysteries* and *Miracle Plays*. The presenting of a Bible story was a Mystery, the life of a saint a Miracle Play. In England we have only one name common to both—the Miracle Play.

As time went on, these performances became much more lengthy and elaborate. On the great feast days of Christmas and Easter, Bible history, from the fall of man to the birth of Christ, or the story of the Crucifixion, was acted ; and

people came in such crowds that the churches could not hold them. This led to a scaffold, which served as a stage, being erected in the churchyard, or some convenient place where the performance could be witnessed by everybody. The acting often continued day by day for a week, and commenced as early as six in the morning. We next find townsmen forming guilds to act, and sometimes giving performances themselves, or assisting the clergy on great occasions. So, gradually, the Miracle Play grew out of its early religious form into a secular entertainment and the favourite amusement of the people. The wife of Bath, Chaucer relates, loved to dress up in her best and go to "playes of miracles."

In the fifteenth century there was not a town in England which had not its play days and its guilds of young men who prepared for them. They very carefully rehearsed their parts, and spent much money on their dresses. All wore masks, and the Devil, who was never absent from any play, was ridiculously arrayed.

The scaffold was divided into many stages, representing a great variety of places—from heaven, with its gilded thrones, to hell, shown as a huge whale's mouth, made of linen and painted to look very dreadful; fire came out of the opening, little devils danced around, to the great amusement of the audience, and from behind the scenes came a devilish noise, produced by knocking pots and pans together, and supposed to represent the moans of the lost souls.

These crude, half-savage plays remained popular in country places even after the production of beautiful dramas. The last recorded representation in England took place in 1580, at Coventry; but on the Continent the Mystery appears never to have died out, for even to-day, in remote parts of France and Italy, the country folk gather together on special fête days to witness the Mystery of some favourite saint, played by artisans and peasants.

But none of these crude dramas deserve to rank as literature. Each play was written by some priest or townsman, to be played on a special occasion by some particular band of

players, and was never intended for publication. All were written in the same style, and had a few comic episodes or interludes introduced to serve as a relief to the story.

One of the earliest play writers was Ralph Higden, a Benedictine monk, who is thought to have composed a long series called the *Chester Plays*, first acted in 1328. They are twenty-four in all, and relate the essential parts of Christianity. Each of the various guilds of Chester acted one set, e.g. the tanners played *The Fall of Lucifer*, and the drapers *The Creation and Fall of Man*.

Copies of other Miracle Plays exist in the *Towneley Plays* and those of York and Coventry.

### *Moral Plays, or Moralities*

Towards the end of the fourteenth century a new form of play was introduced, called the *Morality*; it existed side by side with the Miracle Play. Several examples of these curious dramas are extant. *The Castle of Constance* and *The Humanities*, both composed in Henry VI.'s reign, are characteristic specimens. They somewhat resemble the Miracle Play in form, the chief difference being that the actors represented various virtues and vices, and acted a kind of story which the author invented. As time went on, the allegorical characters became real personages, and in Henry VIII.'s reign, and throughout the conflict of the Reformation, the evil deeds of the friars, monks, and great Church dignitaries were often represented.

Skelton's *Magnificence*, the best of English Moralities, in which the hero is led away by false friends and falls into poverty and despair, conveyed a moral lesson to the prosperous people of the day, who were much given to extravagant display and arrogance. Sir David Lyndsay's *Satire of the Three Estates* was a spirited attack on the corruptions of Church and State in Scotland, and is thought to have done much to help on the Reformation in that country.

The Moralities never gained the same popularity as the Miracle Plays, but were presented down to the close of the sixteenth century.

*Interludes, Masques, and Pageants*

Other forms of entertainments were *Interludes, Masques, and Pageants*.

Under the reigns of Henry VIII. and his daughters, especially Elizabeth, every form of court exhibition was popular. Revels, superintended by a high priest of Jollity, called the Abbot of Misrule, were held at every great house; monarch, noble, and people alike loved play-acting and every kind of show.

*Interludes*, a form of story or satire in dialogue, were especially liked. The idea of these early farces probably originated in the comic episodes of the Miracle Play, though some think that John Heywood, the chief writer of English Interludes, borrowed the suggestion from a kind of rustic farce in vogue in Italy.

Heywood's productions delighted King Henry VIII. and his subjects. *The Four P.'s* is a characteristic example of this form of amusement. It represents a scene between a Palmer, a Pardoner, a Poticary (apothecary), and a Pedlar. The three first, who are renowned for their lying capacities, try who can tell the most astonishing falsehood, and appoint the Pedlar judge. The Palmer wins the day by declaring that in all his life he had never seen a woman out of temper.

*Pageants*, or living pictures, as the word originally meant, may be traced to the Middle Ages, when great victories in battle and other important events were celebrated by triumphant processions. Thus Henry V. pictured the glorious fight of Agincourt to his subjects. Our own Lord Mayor's Show is only a modern version of the pageant.

*Masques* were another favourite amusement of the sixteenth century. In them a kind of story was acted by dumb show and dancing. Later on the masque developed into an acted poetic entertainment. Ben Jonson and Fletcher wrote



masques of exquisite beauty for Elizabeth and James I., and Milton in Charles I.'s reign composed the magnificent *Comus*.

The Marionettes were introduced from Italy in the sixteenth century. The ever-popular Punch and Judy show is our best example of marionettes.

We see in these varied entertainments the foundation of the modern drama. Through them the nation acquired a taste for shows and spectacles of all kinds, and grew accustomed to the acting of crude stories; but before the middle of the sixteenth century no learned man had condescended to write for the stage.

The production of modern plays, the bright story with a happy ending, called *Comedy*, and the more serious tale with an unhappy ending, called *Tragedy*, although in a large measure the outcome of this early work, was partly due to the *New Classical Learning*.

The many Latin and Greek students of the sixteenth century read and delighted in the beautiful plays which had been produced by the ancient writers. The head masters of public schools taught them to their boys, who acted them, even as they do to-day, at their holiday festivals.

About the year 1534, Nicholas Udall, the head master of Eton, instead of giving his pupils the usual Latin play to act, wrote for them our first English Comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister*. The exact date of its production is not known, but it was certainly acted before 1551. The play is written in rhyme and divided into acts and scenes.

The story centres round a feeble, conceited London fop, who makes love to a rich widow, Dame Custance. His suit ends in ignominious flight, after a battle between Ralph and his men and Dame Custance and her women, in which the latter, armed with broomsticks, gain the day. It is an amusing picture of London life and manners of the sixteenth century.

The first Tragedy, *Gorboduc*, or *Ferrex and Porrex*, was played before Queen Elizabeth in 1561. It was the joint

work of two authors, a young student, Thomas Sackville, later renowned as poet and politician, and Thomas Norton. It is founded on a terrible story, told by Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his *Chronicle of British Kings*.

Gorboduc, King of Britain, divides his land during his lifetime between his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex. The sons quarrel and the younger kills the elder. Their mother, who most loves her elder son, in revenge causes the death of the other. The nation rises in rebellion, both father and mother are slain, and the land lies waste during a long civil war.

The style of the play shows that the authors copied the old classical writers. Like Greek plays, it is divided into acts, each ending in a chorus and preceded by a dumb show, in which the incidents of the act are set forth; the murders do not take place on the stage, but are announced by special messengers.

*Gorboduc* likewise marks the introduction of blank verse into the drama. The Earl of Surrey had first used it in poetry proper; Sackville and Norton adopted it for their tragedy.

These two examples of our earliest dramas seem very imperfect when we compare them with the great masterpieces of the Elizabethan dramatists. We do not study them to-day for their literary worth; they only interest us because they were the precursors of our *great dramatic literature*.

## PROSE WRITERS

**Sir Thomas More** (1478-1535).—"Nature never formed a sweeter and happier disposition than that of Thomas More," wrote Erasmus, in one of his first letters from England; and all that can be learned from other sources only tends to prove the justice of Erasmus's opinion.

The son of a great lawyer, Thomas More was born in London and carefully educated by his father. In his fifteenth

year he was placed as page in the household of Archbishop Morton, who, declaring that the youth had the making of a great man in him, sent him to Oxford.

At the University the young student worked very diligently, studying Greek under the guidance of the learned Linacre, and reading so deeply in Latin literature that he made himself the best Latin scholar in England.

About 1498, after he had left Oxford, he met Erasmus, and started a lifelong friendship with the great foreign scholar.

By his father's desire More studied law, and during the last years of Henry VII.'s reign took a part in public affairs as Under-Sheriff for London and Member of Parliament.

He married Jane Colt, a lady of Essex, to whom he was deeply attached, and whose death in early life was a great grief to him. Of her children, the eldest daughter, Margaret, has gained a place among England's greatest women for her high character, accomplishments and devotion to her father.

Henry VIII., professing great love and admiration for More, bestowed upon him many honourable offices, and constantly desired his presence at court.

The young lawyer fell in, much against his will, with the wishes of his royal patron, for the turmoil and splendour of court life had no attraction for him. He loved rather to spend his time in his quiet Chelsea home, surrounded by his children and second wife, the careful housekeeper, "Mistress Alice," in study or in the society of learned friends.

On the fall of Wolsey, in 1529, the King insisted on More's succeeding the Cardinal in his office of Chancellor.

He fulfilled his new duties as they had rarely been performed before; dispensing justice to rich and poor alike, without fear or favour. Wolsey's tenure of office had been marked by much disgraceful bribery; of More it was said that he was ready "to hear every man's cause, poor and rich, and kept no door shut from them."

In the great religious movement of the time, the Chancellor was obliged to take an active part, and shared the intolerant

views of the day on the punishment of heretics ; but he was deeply conscious of the need for reform in the Church, and wrote and laboured for it. He believed, however, in upholding the authority of the Pope as head of the Church, and was too honest to give up his convictions at the King's command. When, therefore, Henry demanded his assent to his marriage with Anne Boleyn, his Chancellor gave up his high office rather than go against his conscience.

The King, ever furious in his hatred towards any man who dared oppose his will, would not permit More to end his days peacefully in study and seclusion, and the story of the last years of the life of this great and good man, against whom no one could bring an accusation, is one of the saddest in our history. In 1534, he was summoned to Lambeth to take an oath accepting Henry as head of the Church and acknowledging his marriage with Anne Boleyn to be legal. More left his much-loved home, knowing he should never return, for to disobey the King meant certain death.

For a year he lay in the dungeons of the Tower, passing some of the dreary hours of his imprisonment in writing, with a coal, touching letters to his daughter, Margaret Roper.

At length he was brought to Westminster for trial and condemned to be beheaded. A pathetic scene occurred on his way to the scaffold. His daughter Margaret, rushing through the soldiers who surrounded her father, threw herself into his arms in one long, sad farewell.

To More's beautiful personal character many men have testified ; his brilliant scholarship, his fund of wit and humour, and, above all, the honesty and purity of his life endeared him to everyone who came in contact with him. He was one of the finest scholars of the day, and the only learned Englishman of the sixteenth century who was admired on the Continent.

*Utopia* is More's best-known work. It was written in Latin, like all learned works of the day, and first printed in Flanders in 1516. Its popularity among scholars was so great that it was reprinted at Paris and Vienna. In England



it was not published till Edward VI.'s reign, when Ralph Robinson produced an English translation.

The work is in two parts. In the first More tells of his going to Flanders on the King's business and having much friendly intercourse with a certain learned Portuguese named Ralph Hythloday. The second consists of Ralph's account of Utopia, which means nowhere.

It is an ideal commonwealth, where no one is rich and no one poor, and everyone works six hours a day and no more. There are no taverns or fashions; no lawyers, for no one disputes; no religious persecutions, for every man worships according to his conscience. Hunting is condemned as a cruel sport, and war cannot exist, as everyone lives in perfect harmony with the community.

Utopia would be a very beautiful land to live in if everyone were good and noble; but it has been considered so impossible to realise such perfection among ordinary human beings that the word "Utopian" is used to-day to signify anything impracticable.

More's *Life and Reign of Edward V.* is the first English work deserving the name of history. It tells in simple and clear language the story of the poor young king and the wicked doings of his uncle, Richard III.

More also wrote many treatises on religious and political subjects, some in English, but the majority in Latin.

**William Tyndale** (1484-1536).—Among the great reformers who suffered death for their religion none holds a higher place than William Tyndale.

Of his early childhood little is known; he is thought to have been born in Gloucestershire, and to have entered Oxford at an early age. At the University he studied under Dean Colet, was an eager student of Greek, and a fine Latin scholar.

Influenced by the religious movement of the time, he sympathised with the work of the Reformers, and resolved to give the people of England the Bible in the native tongue.

In 1523, Tyndale gave up his appointment of tutor, and, coming up to London, was hospitably received by one

Humphrey Monmouth. This friend made the earnest scholar a small money allowance, and thus enabled him to devote all his time to his great work. London was not, however, a safe place for anyone holding different opinions from Henry VIII. ; Tyndale therefore left England, in 1524, for Germany.

In that land he probably met the great reformer, Luther, and, helped by Luther's German Testament and the Greek edition of Erasmus, completed an English translation of the Bible. It was printed partly at Cologne and partly at Worms, and 6,000 copies were despatched secretly to England. Henry VIII. denounced its publication, ordered as many copies as could be discovered to be publicly burnt, and made efforts to capture the heretic author.

Tyndale, undaunted by threats, continued his work at the house of a friend at Antwerp, and had completed a translation of the first five books of the Old Testament when he was treacherously betrayed to the Government of the Netherlands by an Englishman, Henry Philips by name, and confined for eighteen months in the dungeons of the Castle of Vilvorde, near Brussels. There exists a letter, dated from this prison, in which the poor prisoner prays for a lamp, his Hebrew Bible, grammar, and dictionary. It is probable that his request was granted, and that he was able to complete a great part of the Old Testament.

He was tried as a heretic in 1536, and sentenced to be strangled and burnt.

We have much to thank Tyndale for. The clear, simple, beautiful English of his translation of the Bible fixed our language for all time. There are very few words in the whole of the work which are not in common use to-day. He was also the author of many religious treatises in support of the reformed faith.

**Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556), one of the greatest writers among the Reformers, was born of a good old county family at Aslacton, in Nottinghamshire. In boyhood he was placed under the care of so cruel a schoolmaster that the harsh

treatment he received is thought to have destroyed his strength of will.

In 1503 he was sent to Cambridge, and, after taking his degree and entering the Church, was made divinity tutor at the University.

He owed his access to royal favour to his happy suggestion that the King, who had long and ineffectually sought the consent of the Pope to a divorce from his first wife, should appeal to the Universities of Europe to declare his marriage illegal. Cranmer's remark, made at a supper party to a court official, was carried to the King, who declared "the man has got the right sow by the ear." He was rewarded with special honours and, on the death of Warham, made Archbishop of Canterbury.

The new Archbishop supported the King in the changes he brought about in the Church, and in Edward VI.'s reign carried his plans for reform much further than Henry VIII. would have allowed.

He upheld the succession of Lady Jane Grey, and, on her fall, was thrown into prison, by Mary, on charges of heresy and treason. Although, in prison and in fear of death, he signed several recantations of his Protestant faith, he in the end stood firmly by his convictions, and was burnt at Oxford.

Cranmer's chief literary work was the edition of the Book of Common Prayer. He is also the author of twelve homilies, many religious treatises (forty-two in all), and assisted in publishing the Great Bible (that of 1540). Although in the Prayer-book he used many Latin words, his work is on the whole a fine example of English prose.

## POETS

**William Dunbar** (1465?–1530?), sometimes called the Chaucer of Scotland, is certainly the greatest poet of the fifteenth century. He was born, probably, in East Lothian, and received a university education at St. Andrews.

In early life, he tells us, he wandered about England and

France begging for the friars. Returning to Scotland he obtained offices at Court, and was employed by James IV. on several embassies abroad, receiving a pension of £10 a year, afterwards raised to £80.

Of the last years of his life nothing is known ; it is possible that he was killed at the Battle of Flodden Field.

As a poet he is noted for the variety of his verse and his great command of language. He is at times tender, pathetic, rich in fancy, and full of religious devotion ; at others he is bitter, satirical, and coarse.

He railed against the friars and their indulgences, but remained a believer in the Church of Rome.

*The Thistle and the Rose*, one of his chief poems, is an allegory, written on the occasion of the marriage of James IV. with Margaret, daughter of Henry VII.

*The Golden Terge* (1508) is an allegory on love, beauty, and reason, after the style of Chaucer's early poetry.

*The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins* is his masterpiece. In it all the vices are summoned from their dens, with Pride at their head, to join in a terrible dance. It is a mixture of satire and allegory, and abounds in grotesque situations.

**John Skelton** (1460-1529?) is an interesting figure in the literature of the age, because he represents the transition in poetry from the old school—the imitators of Chaucer—to a new school of original poets.

He was born, probably, in Norfolk, and studied at Cambridge and Oxford, receiving at each university special honours as poet.

He was appointed tutor to the young Prince Henry, afterwards Henry VIII., and was much esteemed for his learning. Erasmus speaks of him as "the light and ornament of British letters." In 1498, he entered the Church and was made Rector of Diss in Norfolk. From his life and writings we gather that he was "more fit for the stage than the pulpit."

His vigorous satires against Wolsey aroused the bitter hatred of the great Cardinal. To escape his vengeance, Skelton took refuge in the Sanctuary of Westminster, where he died.



His most noted works were his satires. Of these *The Book of Colin Clout* boldly attacks the ignorance and vice of the clergy, and *Why come ye not to Court?* is a scathing satire on Cardinal Wolsey. He was also the author of some lyrical romantic verse, of which *The Book of Philip Sparrow* is the most pleasing, some Latin verse, and a Morality called *Magnificence*.

Skelton's work is rough, grotesque, extravagant, and coarse; but his quaint rhymes are a great improvement on the traditional stiff metre of his contemporaries, and his lyrics are enlivened by some graceful lines. He was by no means a vain and conceited poet, as his own description of his verse will show.

“Though my rime be ragged,  
Scattered and jagged,  
Rudely raine-beaten,  
Rusty and moth eaten,  
If ye take well therewith  
It hath in it some pith.”

**Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey** (1517?–1547), whose name is linked with Sir Thomas Wyatt's as the inventor of the English sonnet, was a poet of much refinement and picturesque.

Of his short unfortunate life we do not know much. The eldest son of Thomas, Earl of Surrey, he belonged to the old illustrious house of the Duke of Norfolk. He travelled on the Continent, was resident some time in Paris and in Italy, and greatly admired the Italian poets.

There were many intrigues at Court during the last years of Henry VIII., and the Earl of Surrey and his father were the special objects of Lord Seymour's jealousy, as Seymour feared they might become the protectors of the young Prince Edward. The King was easily persuaded to proceed against the relations of his late queen, Catherine Howard, and so both the poet and his father were arrested on a charge of treason.

Nothing could be brought against the son except the frivolous charge of having claimed royal descent by quartering

the arms of Edward the Confessor on his escutcheon. On this absurd accusation he was condemned, and executed on Tower Hill.

In character the poet was proud, haughty, and imprudent.

His verse is a great advance on the poetry of his time on account of its smoothness, grace, and delicacy. He had a musical ear as well as, what was very rare in his day, an eye for the beauties of nature. His sonnets, written in a stanza then little used in England, and modelled on the Italian sonnets, contain much easy and graceful verse. His translation of the second and fourth books of the Latin classic, Virgil's *Æneid*, into unrhymed or blank verse is our first example of that form of poetry.

The Earl's works were circulated in manuscript during his life, and were first published in *Tottel's Miscellany* in the reign of Queen Mary.

#### SONNET IN PRAISE OF FAIR GERALDINE

“Give place, ye lovers, here before  
 That spent your boasts and brags in vain ;  
 My lady's beauty passeth more  
 The best of yours, I dare well sayen,  
 Than doth the sun the candlelight  
 Or brightest day the darkest night.

And thereto hath a troth as just  
 As had Penelope the fair ;  
 For what she saith she may it trust,  
 As it by writing sealed were :  
 And virtues hath she many moe  
 Than I with pen have skill to show.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sith Nature thus gave her the praise,  
 To be the chiefest work she wrought ;  
 In faith, methinks ! some better ways  
 On your behalf might well be sought,  
 Than to compare, as ye have done,  
 To match the candle with the sun.”

From the earliest English poem in blank verse, the translation of the *Æneid*, Book II. :—

THE GHOST OF CREUSA VANISHING FROM ÆNEAS

“ Thus having said, she left me, all in tears  
And minding much to speak ; but she was gone,  
And subtly fled into the weightless air.  
Thrice raught I with mine arms to accol her neck ;  
Thrice did my hands vain hold the image escape,  
Like nimble winds and like the flying dream.  
So, night spent out, return I to my feres ;  
And there, wond’ring, I find together swarmed  
A new number of mates : mothers and men,  
A rout exiled, a wretched multitude,  
From each where flock together, prest to pass,  
With heart and goods, to whatsoever land  
By sliding seas we listed them to lead.”

## THE ELIZABETHAN AGE

(1558-1625)

THE reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I. mark the most wonderful period in English literature.

Our greatest literary genius, Shakespeare, towers high above all the authors of the age, and around him are grouped so great a company of fine writers, that, even were we to exclude his immortal works, the literature of the Elizabethan era would still be remarkable.

We have, as it were, stretched before us a mountain range of dramatic and non-dramatic poets and prose writers, with Shakespeare as the colossal peak.

Spenser in poetry, and Hooker and Bacon in prose, are in themselves important mountains; and, among the authors of some two thousand plays and an immense number of beautiful lyrics, we may complete a list of lesser peaks, appearing small only because they are so close to the great mount, Shakespeare. This extraordinary outburst in literature appears, it would seem at a first glance, almost suddenly about the year 1580; but, if we look more closely, we see that, though great genius can never be accounted for, the glorious events of the times, and the works of the earlier writers of the age, had enormous influence on Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

**Characteristics of the Times.**—The age of Elizabeth was in every way a time of enthusiasm in England.

The terrible religious conflicts which had raged throughout the three preceding reigns were stilled by the more tolerant



Church rule of the Queen and her good Archbishop Parker. Under the wise statesmanship of the great Cecil, Lord Burleigh, the English people enjoyed more freedom than any other European nation of the time. Authors were allowed to write according to their desires, so long as they never criticised the Government, and always flattered and adored the Queen. Patriotism filled the heart of every Englishman during the great struggle with the powerful Spaniard, and people were found ready to risk their lives and sacrifice their wealth for the safety and glory of their country.

The spirit of adventure was, likewise, stronger than it had ever been before. In heavy, lumbering and, as we should think to-day, very unsafe ships, Englishmen made long and dangerous voyages, and became the chief among European explorers. They sailed round the world; explored unknown lands, from the beautiful islands of the West Indies to the cold regions of Labrador and the White Sea, and founded, in America, our first colony. Even to-day stories of their daring exploits deeply interest us, so we can imagine how the contemporaries of Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Drake must have been enchanted with the stories of their adventures and their accounts of unknown lands, filled with wonderful plants and animals, and new races of people.

All these events are reflected in the writings of the day. Shakespeare's enchanted island in *The Tempest* was no doubt modelled on the story he had heard of the rich Bermuda Islands, and in Spenser's allegorical heroes we may often see some noted adventurer of his own day.

We must also remember that the New Learning had done a great work in England. Classical and Italian writers had been, and still were, eagerly read. In this way literary taste was formed.

In more ancient times people of fashion had a great contempt for authors. Even after the introduction of printing, men of rank rarely published their works. They wrote verse and translated foreign writers for the benefit of their own select circle of friends, and considered it

beneath their dignity to present their work to the general public. This prejudice disappeared in Elizabeth's reign, when the learned Lyly and the courtier Spenser thought it no disgrace to be known as authors. They made writing fashionable; people of the highest rank followed in their wake, and tried to get their compositions printed. Even the Queen posed as a poet, and expected to be complimented on the excellence of her verse.

**Literature of the First Twenty Years of Elizabeth's Reign.**—The first twenty years of Elizabeth's reign were years of preparation for the "Giant Age."

Authors were learning how to write, and experimenting in every kind of verse and prose.

The study of the classics was still eagerly pursued, and innumerable translations made from Latin, Greek and the more modern Italian writers.

The works of Virgil, Ovid, Cicero, Plutarch and other ancient authors were put into English, so that all who could read were able to enter the ancient world of thought and literature. Phaer's translation of Virgil, 1562, is especially noteworthy, and it was from Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Ancient Romans* that Shakespeare gathered the stories of his plays on Roman history.

**In Poetry**, the blank verse, introduced by Surrey, was attempted, and every other kind of metre experimented with. As a rule the verse of these years is of little poetic value, but there is one notable exception in the work of Thomas Sackville. He contributed to a popular book, *The Mirror of Magistrates*, the most beautiful verse composed in England between Chaucer and Spenser.

Four other poets deserve to be remembered. They are George Gascoigne, Thomas Churchyard, George Turberville, and Barnabee Googe.

To Gascoigne's fertile brain we owe our first regular verse satire and our first translation of Greek tragedy. Turberville is remembered for his two romances, *The Palace of Pleasure* and the *Tragical Tales*.

Songs, fables, sonnets, ballads and other miscellaneous verse were produced by many poets and published in popular book form, under such titles as *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* and *A Handful of Pleasant Delights*.

In these and other collections, amid a medley of inferior verse, there exist many beautiful little poems. Such exquisite lines as "The falling out of faithful friends, renewing is of love," prove these often unknown poets to have been men of great poetic feeling.

**The Prose writers** had not yet learnt to express themselves in fluent, well-balanced language. Roger Ascham, in a dull, crabbed style, unfolded his excellent views on education in *The Schoolmaster*.

In History, Grafton, Stow, and Holinshed worked vigorously to tell of past events in England. Their chronicles have long since been cast aside for the great works of modern historians, but we must not forget that in Holinshed's *Chronicles* Shakespeare learned all his English history.

In the *Voyages* of Frobisher, the *Accounts of an Expedition in the Northern Seas*, and other books of travel, the stories of travellers who visited far-distant lands found their way into literature.

Romances in prose were for the first time published in Gascoigne's translation of an Italian story, and tales from Italian and Spanish sources were contributed by other writers.

Works on religion took the form of pamphlets; only one work of consequence was produced, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, 1563, which told, in simple style, the dramatic story of religious persecution during the early Tudor reigns.

**The Drama.**—Masques, interludes, plays, which united farce and tragedy, and the more learned translations of Latin and Greek plays were written for every taste and in every form of doggerel verse or prose.

No ceremony or fête day was complete without some performance.

The students of the universities and schools prepared plays to act before the Queen; in the great houses of the nobility

licensed bands of actors, under the patronage of some great lord, performed before a select audience; and the common folk crowded the inn-yards of the towns to laugh or weep over the stories which some travelling troop of actors presented to them. The Puritans alone looked with horror at this popular form of amusement, and did everything in their power to check it; quite unsuccessfully, however, for, in spite of the passing of a law to prevent theatrical representations taking place within the city of London, and in spite of the regulations which treated all actors, except the licensed players, as rogues and vagabonds, theatrical entertainments increased and prospered.

## SECOND ELIZABETHAN PERIOD

The second and great Elizabethan period may be said to begin, in 1579, with the publication of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* and Lyly's *Euphues*. From that date down to the close of James I.'s reign we have a long succession of great writers. So numerous and so great are their works, that we can only hope here to select a few of the most representative men and try to learn something of their writings.

Above all else, this was an age of poets, and with the poets are included the great body of dramatists; for plays were almost invariably written in verse.

The last twenty years of the sixteenth century have been compared to a time of youth. It was an age of love poetry, of romantic and imaginative writing. Poems may be counted by hundreds, one and all inspired by so much natural grace and originality that no other period in our history can show such a record. In the reign of James I. Elizabethan literature reached manhood, and travelled towards old age.

The early years of the seventeenth century saw the production of Shakespeare's most glorious works. As time went on poetry became more learned and philosophical, but lost the natural, spontaneous ideas and language which had characterised the earlier Elizabethans.



**Poetry.**—Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* took the world by storm. It was at once recognised as the most beautiful verse that had ever been produced in the English language. This poem, together with his masterpiece, *The Faerie Queen*, may be said to have revolutionised poetry.

Spenser introduced into English verse a beauty and grace, a stately movement, a plaintiveness, and rich, melodious music, unknown before, and he created a new stanza called after him, "The Spenserian." This metre is nine-lined, and resembles the heroic measure in the number of syllables in the first eight lines, but the lines rhyme alternately. The ninth line is twelve-syllabled (an Alexandrine), which gives a sonorous cadence to the verse.

The flood of poetry which fills these years includes sonnets and songs of every description, romances, translations of Latin and Greek verse, and historical, satirical and philosophic poems.

**Sonnets.**—Amongst the many writers of sonnets, the names of Shakespeare and Spenser stand first; but exquisite verse was written in Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Samuel Daniel's *Delia*, Michael Drayton's *Idea*, Henry Constable's *Diana*, in the sonnets of the Scotch poet, William Drummond, and in the works of other sonneteers. One and all sang of their joys and sorrows in connection with their love for some real or imaginary lady.

Besides the sonnets, songs and madrigals abound. Many a charming lyric, no doubt, was called forth by the musical talent of the age. Lute playing was a favourite accomplishment, and numerous delightful airs were composed to be sung to lute accompaniments. It was necessary to find words for these melodies, and so the poet was called in; Marlowe's sweet song, "Come live with me, and be my love," is one beautiful example. Ben Jonson as song writer had few equals. Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, Thomas Dekker and Sir Walter Raleigh were likewise lyrical poets; and we all know the lovely songs scattered through Shakespeare's plays.

During the latter part of James I.'s reign, Sir John Davies,

the two brothers Giles and Phineas Fletcher (cousins of the dramatist), W. Browne and John Donne continued the lyrical poetry ; but their work, though of great merit, lacks the simple grace and sweetness of their predecessors.

**Poetical romances** of great beauty are seen in such work as *Hero and Leander* of Marlowe, and *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* of Shakespeare.

**Historical Poetry.**—The stirring events of Queen Elizabeth's reign brought forth a new historical poetry.

England, after terrible struggles, had become a great power in Europe ; and Englishmen were proud of their history, and, not content with the work of the chroniclers, celebrated their country's deeds in verse.

Warner's *Albion's England*, Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamund* and *The Wars of York and Lancaster*, Drayton's *Barons' Wars* and *The Battle of Agincourt* are the most important of these patriotic songs.

**Satire.**—To the end of Elizabeth's reign the beginning of English satire may be traced.

Poets of previous ages, such as Skelton in Henry VII.'s reign, had attacked prevailing vices in a coarse, satirical way ; but modern satire, as we understand it—the criticism of man and his works by holding them up to ridicule and scorn—may be said to have commenced with *The Steel Glass* of Gascoigne and the satires of Donne, Lodge, and Marston. None of these works are of much worth, but they no doubt served as models for the first great English satirist, Dryden, who lived nearly a hundred years later.

**Philosophical Poetry.**—The change that came over the spirit of poetry towards the close of our period is seen chiefly in the work of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, Donne and Davies. These poets left the simple, pure and natural verse of Spenser to discuss the deep problems of life in stilted, unnatural verse. The sacred poem of Giles Fletcher, *Christ's Victory*, scarcely shows any falling off in grace and beauty ; but the fantastic Lord Brooke, the philosophical Sir John Davies, and, above all, the elaborately learned, intellec-

tual John Donne indulged in much eccentric, extravagant language, and also led English verse into the realms of metaphysics.

**Drama.**—The most extraordinary event in English literature was the creation and rapid development of the poetic drama.

From the crude productions, the chaos of pseudo-classical, farcical and melodramatic writings of the early Elizabethans, we step almost suddenly into a world of great original dramas, written in blank verse, and performed in licensed theatres.

One of the reasons which led our greatest writers to pour forth their grand conceptions and exquisite poetical ideas in the form of plays, was no doubt the enormous popularity of theatrical entertainments.

The reading public was small, and the cost of printing and publishing great. Unless an author happened to be rich himself, he had to find a patron for his books in some wealthy man who would give him money in return for a flattering dedication, or to look for some state appointment to obtain an income; whereas the playwright could be almost sure of finding a troop of players ready to accept his play and to pay him for it.

Further encouragement was given to the drama by the erection of public theatres.

In 1576, the first theatre was erected at Blackfriars, and was followed by "The Theatre in the fields" at Shoreditch, and later by the "Curtain" and Shakespeare's "Globe."

Crowds of all ranks assembled in these by no means luxurious buildings to witness a play of Shakespeare or one of his contemporaries. The Elizabethan age was a period of prosperity and enjoyment. After a long, elaborate dinner, in which swans, cranes, storks, red and fallow deer, fruits, jellies and spices figured, the prosperous City merchant, the stately court lady and gallant beau, decked in their most gorgeous apparel, with their jewels, stiffly-starched ruffles and wonderful hats, stepped into their barges, and travelled over London's chief thoroughfare, the Thames, to pass the afternoon in one

of these popular houses ; whilst the most highly favoured at Court would join the Queen and her courtiers at one of the theatres in the palaces of Whitehall, Greenwich or Richmond.

“Those flights upon the banks of Thames, that so did take Eliza and our James,” wrote Ben Jonson ; but probably not one member of these enthusiastic audiences imagined that three hundred years later those identical plays would still delight the London playgoer.

The plays are the same, but the theatres are very different.

**The Theatres in Shakespeare's Time.**—In the early buildings the centre was open to the skies, forming an open space very like the old inn-yard, which had so long been the scene of theatrical triumphs. The price of admission to this part of the house was twopence. Around this, equivalent to the pit, little rooms—our boxes—contained the ladies, all wearing masks ; whilst, on the stage itself, amid the rushes which strewed the floor, stools accommodated the young gallant of the period, who paid his half-crown, and sat smoking the fashionable tobacco through silver pipes, and cracking jokes with his friends. At about two o'clock in the afternoon a flourish of trumpets announced that the play was about to begin. The prologue was recited, and the curtains drawn back.

The stage scenery was not at all like the grand displays of to-day. There would be draperies round the walls, black or coloured, according to whether the play was tragedy or comedy. A blue canopy represented the sky, and at the back of the stage was a most useful balcony. It might represent a hill, a room, a window, or anything the artist desired. For a change of scene a board would be put up, with the name of the place supposed to be represented written largely upon it ; so that the same scene would do for London, or Bohemia, or the plains of Agincourt, or the garden and balcony of *Romeo and Juliet*, or the palace of *Macbeth*. There was not much moveable scenery ; wooden imitations of towers, trees and animals were used ; and beds, tables and chairs introduced



for furnishing. There were no women actresses; the Juliets, Rosalinds and Ophelias of Shakespeare's day were boys.

The audience must certainly have gathered to hear the play, not, as is too often the case in our own day, to see the fine scenery. To realise the places presented, they must have had as vivid imaginations as we had in our nursery days, when the sofa was anything to us from a shop's counter to a coach-and-four.

When we come to examine the plays themselves, it is difficult to realise how much was accomplished in the forty years which elapsed between the production of the first comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister*, and a play by Shakespeare. In the early Elizabethan days, though every kind of writing had been attempted, nothing great had been accomplished.

It was among the immediate predecessors of Shakespeare, the group of talented playwrights known as "University Wits," who wrote between 1580 and 1596, that the first interesting work appeared. They were men who had had a university education, and knew something of Greek and Latin plays.

Chief among them was Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Nash and John Lyly. They wrote some hundreds of plays in rhyme, prose and blank verse, and may be regarded as the earliest *real* dramatists, the first to conceive of tragedy and comedy in the modern sense. Kyd and Peele were probably the pioneers of the new drama; but their plays are so often undated and unnoted historically, that it is very difficult to trace their work, as is indeed the case with many of the Elizabethan playwrights.

Kyd introduced a new spirit into tragedy in his *Spanish Tragedy*, 1587; and Greene is thought to have been the first to adopt Kyd's methods in his *Orlando* and *Alphonsus*.

Lyly's plays, of which *Phaon* and *Endymion* are the chief, are mainly in prose; he may be said to have originated the idea of prose dialogue.

But Marlowe is by far the most important of Shakespeare's

predecessors. As a dramatist, he is more than their equal; as a poet, he far surpasses them. His first tragedy, *Tamburlaine*, written in blank verse, caused that form of metre to be adopted generally for the drama, and his *Faustus* is considered the best play produced before 1590.

Meanwhile, in the school of these university wits, a young man from Stratford-on-Avon, who had had no university training, was learning the technical work of the playwright. By the year 1593 Shakespeare was known as the author of at least three original plays. Between the years 1593 and 1611 he produced his long list of dramatic and poetic masterpieces, beginning with *Love's Labour's Lost* and ending with *The Tempest* and *Winter's Tale*—"the greatest, most varied, and most perfect work done by any man in literature." In comedy or tragedy his work is a literature in itself. His "omnipresent creativeness" embraces the vast world of human nature and leaves but a small space for his contemporaries and followers.

Chief among his contemporaries was Ben Jonson, whose massive intellect dominated the reign of James I. He was far more learned than his great friend, but lacked the charm of his romantic genius. Even in his two masterpieces, *Volpone the Fox* and *The Alchemist*, he is ponderous; and his characters are types rather than individuals. But he was the most honoured figure of the early years of the seventeenth century—a little literary king, whose followers are known as "the tribe of Ben."

Thomas Dekker, John Marston and George Chapman figure as fellow-workers with Shakespeare; they produced, especially the two former, important work.

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, among the later Elizabethans, possessed Shakespeare's romantic spirit, and wrote works of genius in *The Maid's Tragedy*, *Philaster* and *A King and no King*; and Webster, in *The Duchess of Malfy*, produced a fine tragedy.

The plays of Cyril Tourneur, Philip Massinger, John Ford, Thomas Middleton, John Heywood and other minor play-

wrights bring our period to a close. Their work is inferior in every way to that of the earlier dramatists. They wrote at a time when the nation had lost its spirit of enthusiasm and fine moral feeling. They represent the decline of the Elizabethan drama.

James Shirley, who lived in Charles I.'s reign, should be included in this era; for, although he wrote at a later date, his work resembles so closely the plays of the last-named dramatists that he is justly called "the last of the Elizabethans."

**Prose.**—Side by side with this extraordinary outburst of poetic and dramatic genius, there was a development in prose, though, with two exceptions, Hooker and Bacon, the prose writers of the age wrote crudely, or indulged in fantastic language.

The great name of Sir Francis Bacon overshadows all the writers of the last years of Elizabeth's and the whole of James I.'s reign.

The first great English philosopher preferred to write his scientific works in Latin, and looked with some contempt on his mother tongue. It is his English works, however, which are most read to-day. In the *Essays*, and more especially in the *Advancement of Learning*, his clear and apt English have placed him in the first rank of prose writers before the reign of Charles I.

**Theology.**—Our first important theological writer appeared in Richard Hooker, whose *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is still regarded as a masterpiece of English eloquence. Hooker is profoundly philosophical, and as a writer of majestic English is considered by some critics superior even to Bacon.

Several carefully revised versions of the Bible were published in Elizabeth's reign, and in James I.'s time our own present Authorised Version was carefully edited by some of the best English scholars of the day. For its style alone it will ever be memorable, for it contains some of the most beautiful writing in our language.

Of **Prose Romances** a goodly array were produced; some

are original work, but more often English writers were content to translate Spanish, Italian, and French love stories. Lodge and Greene were the chief romance writers. The dramatists often went to these tales for the foundation of their plays; thus, Shakespeare's *As You Like It* was drawn from the *Romance of Rosalynde*, by Lodge.

In the long, tedious romance of the *Euphues*, by John Lyly, we have an example of a curious style of writing. The book contains some pretty ideas, but is extravagant, artificial, and affected.

It was greatly admired by the courtiers and high-born ladies of the day. They copied *Euphues* in their manner of talking and writing; and the term "euphuism" was created to represent Lyly's style.

Shakespeare laughs at the fashion in *Love's Labour's Lost*, where one of the characters is represented as "a man of fine new words, fashion's own knight, that hath a mint of phrases in his brain, one whom the music of his own brave tongue doth ravish like enchanting harmony."

The romance *Arcadia*, by Sir Philip Sidney, is free from Lyly's affectations, and is an example of artistic poetic prose; and Bacon, in his *New Atlantis*, wanders into the realms of fancy with delightful results.

**A school of poetical criticism** had already arisen, and to it Sidney contributed his *Defense of Poesie*. From this, and other works of a like nature, we see what great attention was paid to poetry. The writers not only set down excellent rules for writing, but defended poetry from the attacks of the Puritans, who declared poetry to be immoral.

**Historical writing** is represented by Bacon's clear and graphic *History of Henry VII.'s Reign*, Raleigh's *History of the World*, Daniel's *History of England*, Knolles's *History of the Turks*, and the learned treatises of Speed, Camden, Spelman and Selden.

**Miscellaneous Works.**—Books of travel appeared in Hakluyt's *Navigation, Voyages and Discoveries*, and in the works of several writers in James I.'s reign.



Sir Thomas Overbury's *Characters* gave short sketches of prominent men, and may be regarded as the earliest attempt at biography.

The Scotch poet Drummond contributed a curious little treatise, in *A Cypress Grove*; and Ben Jonson's *Discoveries* had enormous influence on the young prose writers of the day.

**Pamphlets.**—To these times may, also, be traced our earliest form of magazine and newspaper. A mass of pamphlets still exist dealing with a variety of subjects such as religion, morality, the manners of the times or giving narratives of passing events.

This popular work has not much literary value, but is very interesting because it gives us a picture of the times, in somewhat the same way as a bundle of our present newspapers may tell future generations about the people of the nineteenth century. There is, however, one great difference between modern papers and the Elizabethan pamphlet. Neither Queen Elizabeth nor King James allowed their subjects to express opinions differing from their own views on politics and religion, so writers rarely ventured to discuss political matters; and, although in religion the Puritans sometimes dared to protest strongly against the Established Church, they always wrote anonymously, and were compelled to publish their treatises with the utmost secrecy.

The *Martin Marprelate Pamphlets*, as they are called after one of the writers, give us a curious example of Puritan feeling, and show clearly the extraordinary prejudice which existed on religious questions. Some are well written; but, as a rule, abuse takes the place of argument.

The pamphleteers are, however, but minor writers in this extraordinary age; an age so full of interest, so rich in magnificent work, that to know even one of the authors well means long years of patient study. Of the plays of Shakespeare we can never know enough, each re-reading reveals new beauties; and Marlowe, Ben Jonson and his Tribe are almost inexhaustible.

Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is still a much-prized classic, and

Bacon stands on the threshold of all modern philosophy, "a bell ringer," as he himself declares, "who is up first to call others to church."

## POETS

**Edmund Spenser (1552-1599).**—The second in point of time among our great poets was born in London, and belonged to a family, as he tells us, "of ancient fame"—the Spensers of Althorpe. His father, although of noble birth, was not rich; the whole story of our poet's life is truly summed up by one of his admirers as "poorly poor man he lived, poorly poor man he died."

As a boy he went to the Merchant Taylor's School, and from there to Cambridge, where as a sizar (an appointment by which he received his board in return for services) he was able to pursue his studies without much cost to his family.

From college he went to the North of England, probably as tutor, and commenced his first important poem, *The Shepherd's Calendar*. In it he tells of his love for a lady Rosalind, "a fair widow's daughter of the glen," who did not return his affection, and for whom he long sorrowed. We next find him staying with Sir Philip Sidney, in his beautiful Kentish home at Penshurst, and publishing, in 1579, his poem with a dedication to this friend. The production of *The Shepherd's Calendar* marks an epoch in the history of our poetry. It was the first great poem in an age devoted to verse-making.

Sir Philip Sidney no doubt introduced the new poet to his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, who held at that time a very high place in the Queen's favour. Through his influence he was appointed secretary to Lord Grey de Wilton, the new Lord Deputy of Ireland. These were days of rebellion and cruel bloodshed in Ireland, and Spenser, like many other Englishmen in those days, would have preferred to remain in England. It was, however, the only appointment offered him.

In 1580, he crossed with Lord Grey to Ireland, and commenced a long sojourn in that distracted land. Spenser

shared the common belief of the time that the country should be governed by harshness, and must have witnessed many terrible scenes of massacre and misery. His views on the government he ably set forth in a prose pamphlet, *View of the Present State of Ireland*. In 1591, he was given the beautiful estate of Kilcolman, in Cork, the forfeited home of a noted Irishman, the Earl of Desmond. Amidst the wild scenery of this lovely country he wrote *The Faerie Queene*.

In 1594, he married a lady named Elizabeth, and in her honour composed an exquisite marriage song.

His oft-repeated wish for an appointment in England was not granted. He remained in Ireland, among a people he hated and who detested him, till, in a fresh rebellion in 1598, his castle was sacked and burnt, one of his children perishing in the flames. With his wife the poet fled to England, reaching London homeless and destitute.

His friends, no doubt, came to his assistance, but the poet's life was crushed. He died in a poor lodging in King Street, Westminster, three months after his arrival, and was buried in Westminster Abbey by the side of his great predecessor, Chaucer, who, as he was wont to say, had taught him his songs.

The only description we have of his person is that he was a little man, and wore short hair.

As poet Spenser has ever been regarded with admiration. The beauty, refinement, and melody of his verse, his wealth of language, imagination and love for all things beautiful, have given him an enduring place in literature.

*The Faerie Queene* is by far the most important of his works. It is a long allegorical poem, in which the poet intended to set forth the warfare of twelve knights illustrating twelve moral virtues. He only lived to complete six of the books. The idea and framework of the poem was drawn from the work of two Italian poets, Ariosto and Tasso. Chaucer's influence is also noticeable.

For his metre, Spenser invented the nine-lined stanza which bears his name.

The hero of the stories is Prince Arthur, in whom the highest moral virtues are represented. This prince sees in a vision the Faerie Queene, and is so enraptured by her beauty, that he resolves to search for her in Faerie Land. We are next carried to those mystic realms, where the queen is represented as holding a twelve-day festival, during which twelve of her knights, each representing some moral virtue, such as holiness, temperance or chastity, undertake some great and dangerous enterprise. In these adventures Prince Arthur appears as the all-powerful hero, whose aid always helps the knight on to a glorious victory.

The first book recounts the adventures of the Red Cross Knight.

After many dangers, combats and defeats, in which the hero has to fight a terrible dragon and to escape the wiles of a deceitful witch, Duessa, he triumphs, and a fair princess, Una, who represents truth, becomes his bride.

Besides the spiritual allegory of his poem, Spenser sought to illustrate the leading people and events of his day. Thus the Faerie Queene is Queen Elizabeth, whom he addresses in his dedication as the most high, mighty and magnificent Empress, renowned for piety, virtue, and all gracious government. The witch Duessa is Mary Queen of Scots, and the heroes of the stories illustrate such great men as Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Philip Sidney.

As the work goes on Spenser often leaves his original theme to tell of other things. In this way we get delightful pictures of the poet's own time. The loyalty and gallantry of those that took part in the daring enterprises against Spain are set forth, and the wild scenery of Ireland and wonderful stories of the great new continent are mixed up with legends of dwarfs, witches and giants. In all, Spenser's love of the good and beautiful prevails.

The first three books when completed, in 1589, were read to Sir Walter Raleigh, who was then in Ireland. Raleigh was so delighted with the work that he insisted on Spenser going over to England with him to be presented to the Queen.



The poet gave an account of this visit in his poem, *Colin Clout come Home again*.

Of Spenser's other poems, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, the first published, is the most important. It illustrates the poet's vivid imagination, his freshness and originality, and his power of telling a tale. It consists of a series of stories, some of his own sad experiences as a lover, others of the fables of the Oak, the Briar, the Fox and Kid. The last-named story was used again in *Mother Hubbard's Tale*. The *Prothalamion* celebrates the marriage of two ladies, and laments the deaths of Sir Philip Sidney and the Earl of Leicester.

The *Amoretti Sonnets* and the *Epithalamion* tell of the poet's own wooing and marriage. His wedding hymn is one of the most beautiful examples of the kind in our language.

Example of the Spenserian stanza from *The Faerie Queene* :—

THE RED CROSS KNIGHT AND UNA

“ A gentle knight was pricking one the plaine,  
Ycladd in mightie armes and silver shielde,  
Wherein old dints of deep woundes did remaine,  
The cruel markes of many a bloody felde ;  
Yet armes till that time did he never wield :  
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,  
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield :  
Full iolly knight he seemed, and faire did sitt,  
As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt.

And on his brest a bloodie crosse he bore,  
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,  
For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,  
And dead, as living ever, him ador'd :  
Upon his shield the like was also scor'd,  
For soveraine hope, which in his helpe he had.  
Right, faithfull, true he was in deede and word ;  
But of his cheere did seeme too solemne sad ;  
Yet nothing did he dread, but ever was *ydrad*.

Upon a great adventure he was bond,  
 That greatest Gloriana to him gave,  
 (That greatest glorious queene of Faery lond,)  
 To winne him worshippe, and her grace to have,  
 Which of all earthly thinges he most did crave ;  
 And ever, as he rode, his hart did earne  
 To prove his puissance in battell brave  
 Upon his foe, and his new force to learne ;  
 Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne."

### DRAMATIC POETS

**Christopher Marlowe** (1564?–1593) is the chief of the group of playwrights who preceded Shakespeare. He was the son of a shoemaker of Canterbury, educated at the King's School in that city, and sent, probably through the kindness of a friend, to the University of Cambridge, where he graduated as M.A. in 1587. Whilst at the University he is thought to have written his first play, *Tamburlaine the Great*. His short life was wild and reckless. In company with other university wits, who like himself wrote for the stage as a means to live, he spent his time in London taverns amid scenes of riot and dissipation till 1593, when he was killed in a drunken brawl.

Marlowe takes high rank as dramatic poet. As the author of our first great tragedies, and as the first great writer of blank verse, he may be said to have prepared the way for Shakespeare. Though inferior to him in genius, and having none of his sense of humour, his plays are worked out with great skill and the characters well drawn ; he had the true spirit of poetry and a splendid imagination.

He was the entire author of five plays : *Tamburlaine the Great*, *Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward II.*, *The Massacre of Paris*, and probably collaborated with Shakespeare in *Henry VI.* He likewise wrote *The Passionate Pilgrim to his Love*, and left unfinished the beautiful poem of *Hero and Leander*.

All his plays are tragedies ; each one illustrates some ruling passion ; thus, in *Tamburlaine* (first acted in 1587) we see

the result of an Eastern monarch's ambition to rule over a great empire.

*Faustus* tells of a man who wished to possess all knowledge and enjoy all the pleasures of life without toil. It was founded on an old German legend which had been translated into English. *Faustus* was born of poor parents, studied at a university, and became a learned doctor. Not content with a quiet career, he turned to magic, despised God and the Sciences, and sold himself to the devil.

THE PASSIONATE SHEPHERD TO HIS LOVE

“Come live with me and be my love ;  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That hills and valleys, dales and fields,  
Woods or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,  
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks  
By shallow rivers to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses,  
And a thousand fragrant posies ;  
A cap of flowers and a kirtle  
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool  
Which from our pretty lambs we pull ;  
Fair-lined slippers for the cold  
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw and ivy buds,  
With coral clasps and amber studs,  
An' if these pleasures may thee move,  
Come live with me and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing  
For thy delight each May morning :  
If these delights thy mind may move,  
Then live with me and be my love.”

**William Shakespeare** (1564-1616). — Innumerable have been the books written about England's greatest literary genius, and unending the efforts made to discover every

detail of his life ; yet, when all has been told that we can be at all sure about, we have but an imperfect picture of the immortal poet, whose works are treasured to-day by the whole of the civilised world.

His thirty-seven plays are an inexhaustible mine of poetry and the experiences of human life ; through them we may know far more of the great Englishman, of whom we are so justly proud, than we are ever likely to find out by the most exhaustive inquiry into his pedigree or the traditions of his life.

But, none the less, every lover of Shakespeare wishes to make the pilgrimage to the picturesque old country town in the "heart of England," Stratford-on-Avon, which was the place of his birth and death. The little town, which in the sixteenth century numbered some 1,400 people, is built on the banks of the tranquil Avon, and surrounded by the peaceful scenery of rich meadows, woods and wild flowers so often introduced in the plays.

The stately church and the Guildhall were the two chief buildings of the town in Shakespeare's day ; and an old house is still pointed out, in Henley Street, as the place of his birth.

His father, John Shakespeare, was at one time a prosperous trader in corn and timber, possibly also a farmer and butcher. He married Mary Arden, the daughter of a wealthy farmer, and had several children, of whom William was the third.

The boy was sent to school at the Free Grammar School of Stratford, where he learned English, mastered the difficulties of Lyly's Latin Grammar, and perhaps was taught a little Greek.

His school life was short, for his father had fallen into money difficulties, and required his son's help. So, probably at the age of thirteen, Shakespeare left school and was apprenticed to his father's trade.

It would thus seem that his chances of literary success in life were for ever cut off ; but the simple duties of a Stratford tradesman could not mar his intellect, nor prevent



his development. The great school of human nature was undoubtedly our genius poet's chief teacher; but he must likewise have continued to work at his books, for, although his friend Ben Jonson said of him in after life, "he had small Latin and less Greek," he made himself a superb writer of verse and a most wonderful master of English. Over 15,000 different words occur in his plays.

Stories are told of the wild pranks of his youth, but we know nothing for certain of his early days except that, at the age of nineteen, he married Anne Hathaway, who lived in a cottage, which still exists, at Shottery, near Stratford. She was eight years older than her husband.

For four or five years after his marriage Shakespeare continued to live at Stratford, and had three children—Susannah, and twins, Hamnet and Judith. One tradition hath it that he left his native town to escape the results of deer-stealing from the park of a rich squire, Sir Thomas Lucy; more probably it was his ambition to become an actor.

No doubt, as a boy, he had witnessed the performances of strolling players in his native town; he may even, on the occasion of the Queen's visit to Kenilworth, have been taken to see the wonderful shows and plays which were produced for her entertainment. At all events he left Stratford in about 1587, possibly with a company of players, possibly alone, and found his way to London.

How the first years of his life in the metropolis were spent we do not know; perhaps he joined one of the licensed company of players, beginning, tradition says, as call-boy.

His marvellous intelligence soon led to promotion, and, before the year 1592, he must have been known as a reviser of plays and author of original works; for Robert Greene, the dramatist, was evidently very jealous of his popularity when he wrote of him as "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tyger's heart wrapt in a player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blanke verse as the best of you; and being an absolute Johannes factotum is in his owne conceit, the only Shake-scene in

the countrie." Greene appears, however, to have been Shakespeare's only enemy; another writer, in the same year, says, "he (Shakespeare) is excellent in the quality he professes"; and the young and accomplished Earl of Southampton became his patron and friend, receiving the flattering dedication of his poems, the only works printed under Shakespeare's own direction.

His work as actor and dramatist was carried on at the "Theatre," Shoreditch, till 1595, when the house was demolished, and he went with his company to the new Globe Theatre, on the Bankside, Southwark, in which house his greatest productions were first presented. By this time he was making a good income as an actor; his plays, however, did not bring him much money. They were sold to the manager of the theatre at prices averaging about £11. Every effort was made to prevent them from getting into print; nevertheless, so popular were they, that sixteen were published by piratical printers during their author's life.

The Queen often summoned Shakespeare's company to act before her in one of the royal palaces, and seems to have been especially delighted with *Henry IV.*; for it is said that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written in response to her request that he should write another play about Falstaff.

By the year 1599, Shakespeare had shares in the Globe Theatre, and was growing wealthy. His life in London had brought him, no doubt, both joys and sorrows. He had good friends in Lord Essex and Lord Pembroke, and joined many of the jovial gatherings at the Mermaid Tavern, which were presided over by Ben Jonson.

In the conflicts between rival authors he took no part; even to Ben Jonson, whose quarrelsome nature was notorious, he was ever "sweet Master Shakespeare." He must have been a most industrious worker. The years 1597 to 1611, which mark the production of his long list of masterpieces, were also for the most part busy years of acting.

In the midst of the turmoil and prosperity of his London

life Shakespeare, no doubt, often thought of his old, quiet, country home in the pleasant valley of the Avon.

About 1596 he returned to Stratford, for the first time since he had left it a penniless young man, and rescued his father from his money difficulties. After that date he appears to have gone home every year, and to have gradually bought up a good deal of property in the neighbourhood of his native town, notably a large house called New Place. In 1611 he gave up his London work and retired to this delightful country house to spend the remainder of his life, as a country gentleman, in the companionship of his wife and daughters (his son had died some years earlier). He probably occasionally visited his old friends in London, and they sometimes came down to Stratford. One story hath it that it was after a visit from Ben Jonson, during which the old friends had renewed pleasant memories in convivial entertainment, that Shakespeare was taken ill with the fever which caused his death.

He died in 1616, and was buried in the parish church of the town. A few years later a bust of the poet was erected over the grave, and still may be seen there, and an old portrait hangs in the museum of the town which is thought to have been painted from life; it represents him with a fine head, a powerful face, hazel eyes, auburn hair, moustache, and imperial. A contemporary speaks of him as "a handsome, well shap't man."

Of his personal character we can gather very little from authentic history. That he was a modest, lovable, humorous companion we may be sure; that he possessed little ambition in life beyond the desire for a peaceful retreat to his old country home is almost equally certain.

Of his supreme genius the world has long since been convinced. "In knowledge of human character, in wealth of humour, in depth of passion, in fertility of fancy and in soundness of judgment he has no rival."

As poet, his glorious verse, whether in lyric or sonnet form, or blank verse, holds us spellbound; as dramatist he is an immortal king.

His plays have been translated more frequently, and into a greater number of languages, than any other works in the world, if we except the Bible.

We may divide Shakespeare's works into four divisions, representing different periods of his life. It is difficult to ascertain the dates of their production with certainty, but from internal evidence, chiefly the metre of the verse, the use of metaphor and conceits, and the treatment of the subjects, we can follow the years in which they were written.

**First Period (1590-1596).**—The works of Shakespeare's youth are marked by great vivacity and are composed in rhyme and blank verse. His first poem, *Venus and Adonis*, published 1593, was perhaps written before he left Stratford; he calls it "first heir of my invention."

The earliest dramatic work took the form of revision of old plays and the writing of new ones, in partnership with some other dramatist, probably Marlowe.

*Titus Andronicus* and the first part of *Henry VI.* are thought to be the result of this partnership.

The years 1590 and 1591 saw the completion of Shakespeare's first original comedy, *Love's Labour's Lost*.

It was followed by the romantic love story of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and a boisterous farce, *The Comedy of Errors*.

*Romeo and Juliet*, completed probably in 1592, was his first tragedy. It is founded on a tragic romance of Italian origin, and paints the joy and anguish of two lovers, a youth and a maiden of the sunny south, with much sweetness and grace.

In spite of certain quibbles and conceits, the beautiful verse which portrays the youthful passion of the lovers has made it ever a popular play. "As a tragic poem on the theme of love it has no rival in any literature."

In common with other sixteenth-century writers, Shakespeare was inspired with the spirit of patriotism, and turned to the history of his own land for the stories of many of his plays.



From the dry *Chronicles* of Holinshed he drew the materials for the second and third parts of *Henry VI.* (1592), *Richard III.*, and *Richard II.* (1593), and *King John* (1594). In his hands those reigns developed into vivid historical pictures. The battlefield of Bosworth, the wickedness of King John, and, above all, the pathetic scene between Prince Arthur and Hubert, as described in the plays, take us back to the tragic acts of past times as no history can ever succeed in doing.

The year 1594 saw the printing of the poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, and probably some of the *Sonnets* date from the same year.

The delightful comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written in 1595 to celebrate a marriage, is a veritable fairyland of delights. It has a classic love story, charming fairy episodes, with the inimitable Puck as chief spokesman, and a humorous picture of the rough workmen of Queen Elizabeth's day trying to act a play.

**Second Period (1596-1600).**—To these years belong some of Shakespeare's happiest comedies. The poet had completely mastered the art of writing, and had gained a deeper knowledge of human character. From 1596 to the close of his career he employed blank verse, with occasional passages in prose.

*The Merchant of Venice* belongs to 1596, possibly 1594. The story, which was drawn from an Italian source, centres around the dark doings of a hated Jew. In it we are introduced to the first of Shakespeare's great women—the heroine Portia.

In the historical play of *Henry IV.* (1597) we make our first acquaintance with Falstaff.

More rollicking comedy followed in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and also in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which gives an amusing picture of the English middle classes and a continuation of the pranks of Falstaff.

In 1598, the historical plays came to a close with *Henry V.*, in which the spirited character of the Prince Hal, who figures in *Henry IV.*, is more fully developed.

*Much Ado about Nothing* (1599), *As You Like It* (1599), and *Twelfth Night* (1600) are the last joyful comedies of the period.

*Much Ado about Nothing* was founded in part on an Italian story. The lively humour of Benedick and Beatrice and the sad wooing of Claudio and the gentle Hero are well contrasted.

The lovely pastoral play of *As You Like It*, founded on Lodge's *Romance of Rosalynde*, contains Shakespeare's most brilliant woman, Rosalind, contrasted with three other girls of different types—Celia, Phœbe, and Audrey. *Twelfth Night*, once more founded on an Italian story, tells the history of Viola, the sweetest of all Shakespeare's maidens.

**Third Period** (1600–1608).—As Shakespeare grew in experience of human life, his spirit was touched by the sorrows and tragic problems of humanity. In the Sonnets, probably completed in 1602, he is thought to have expressed his own bitter sufferings in love, and his sorrow at the unfaithfulness of a friend in whom he had placed implicit trust.

In his plays he left the bright happy comedy of earlier years to paint the darker side of life and the tragic experiences to which all flesh is heir.

*Julius Cæsar* (1601) is drawn, like all his plays on Roman history, from North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of Ancient Romans*.

In the life and sad fate of Brutus, "the noblest Roman of them all," we read the story of a great man who failed because, although he had noble aims, he was incapable of action.

*Hamlet* (1602) has been the most widely read and acted of all the plays. The story may have been drawn from an old play or from an old prose story.

In the character of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, the deepest thoughts and saddest feelings of life are expressed. Like *Julius Cæsar*, the play is "a tragedy of thought."

*All's Well that Ends Well* (1602?), *Troilus and Cressida* (1603?), and *Measure for Measure* (1604) are comedies only in having a happy ending. They, especially *Measure for Measure*, are painfully sad stories.

In the tragedies, *Othello* (1604), *Macbeth* and *King Lear* (both written in 1606), we have, perhaps, Shakespeare's most magnificent work. In 1607, he joined some unknown writer in *Timon of Athens*, and in about 1608 and 1609 produced his last tragedies—the powerful Roman plays of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. These masterpieces, one and all, illustrate the terrible results of giving way to passions, by describing the merciless fate which falls on crime, unlawful ambition, pride, cruelty, jealousy and ingratitude. All the varying moods and passions of mankind are painted with terrible reality. Thus Othello, blinded by jealousy, kills the woman he loves best in the world, and King Lear is driven into misery and death by the wicked ambition of his daughters.

**Fourth Period (1608–1613).**—The plays which mark the closing years of our poet's dramatic career are romantic and peacefully happy comedies. His last play written in London was probably the comedy *Pericles* (part only is his work). In his Stratford home he composed the romantic comedies of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*—all written before 1611.

To the same years may be assigned *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII.*, which are considered the joint work of Shakespeare and Fletcher.

*The Winter's Tale* especially reflects the serene beauty of rural life. The story is drawn in part from a tale written by Greene, and contains one of Shakespeare's incomparable creations—the rogue-pedlar Autolycus. In *The Tempest* we are carried to the Bermuda Islands and introduced to a world of magic. When, after shipwreck and many troubles, all the characters of the play are restored to happiness, Shakespeare, in the person of Prospero, bids farewell to the stage. He declares—

“I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And, deeper than did ever plummet sound,  
I'll drown my book.”

It would be impossible to give any idea of the grandeur and variety of Shakespeare's work by quoting extracts from his plays. We can all read them in their entirety. They are the study of a lifetime; the more we know of them the dearer they become to us.

**Ben Jonson** (1574-1637).—One of the most striking figures in this great age is "honest Ben Jonson." As poet, as scholar, as literary king, he reigned supreme over the tribe of young men who loved to be called his followers.

He was born at Westminster of poor parentage. His father, a clergyman, died before his birth; his mother remarried, taking as her second husband a master bricklayer.

After a short school career at Westminster, Ben was taken from his books to be apprenticed to his stepfather's craft. As "he could not endure the occupation," he ran away from home to serve as a soldier in the Netherlands.

In the rough and boisterous life of the army he was distinguished for bravery, but his love for books brought him back to England. What he did on his return home is not known; possibly he found the means to go to Cambridge. Anyway, he was enabled to follow the desires of his heart, for in after years he was renowned for his scholarship.

About 1597, he settled in London as actor and playwright, and commenced a long struggle with poverty, from which he ultimately emerged famous.

From about 1598, he was known as a distinguished author. Men of high renown sought the praise of the learned poet; he was given the seat of honour at the Mermaid Tavern, where the great men of the day, including Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh, met for social intercourse and big suppers; and his rough and lively humour enlivened many a jovial gathering. He was, however, of a very proud and arrogant nature, and was engaged in incessant quarrels with fellow-writers.

In the early part of James I.'s reign he held a post at Court somewhat similar to the present poet laureateship, and wrote some charming masques for the Court entertainments.



He also visited Scotland, staying with the Scotch poet, William Drummond, of Hawthornden, who afterwards wrote an unkindly criticism of his English guest.

The last years of this powerful man, who had for so long ruled the literary world, were spent in poverty and disgrace. The production of a play, *Eastward Ho!* written in partnership with Marston and Chapman, which criticised somewhat severely James I.'s followers in London, greatly displeased the King. The three playwrights went to prison, and Ben Jonson never regained Court favour.

He had many enemies among the men whose works he had sometimes arrogantly condemned in the days of his power, and by their efforts he was completely ruined.

The last years of his life were years of great sickness and privation, but he still retained the reverence and affection of the younger poets; and Charles I. and the Earl of Newcastle both assisted him with gifts of money.

He died from dropsy in 1637, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, under a tombstone which bears this concise yet truthful inscription, "O rare Ben Jonson!"

His works, in all, number about fifty, and include comedies, tragedies, masques, interludes, prose treatises, and many miscellaneous poems.

As a dramatist, he originated a new order of plays, studied, as he says, from "the recent humours or manners that went along with the times." He had not the romantic, passionate feeling for all mankind which characterises Shakespeare and makes the latter's plays as suitable for the nineteenth as for the sixteenth century. Jonson's plots represent the oddities, the manners, and customs of his own age; his characters are types rather than real individuals. He is a solid, ponderous and classical writer, yet, withal, powerful, robust, imaginative, and possessing a fund of humour.

His plays, written for the most part in prose, have complicated plots, clearly thought out, and give us a graphic picture of the English life of the period.

His comedies include *Every Man in His Humour* (1598),

*Every Man out of His Humour*, (1599), *Cynthia's Revels*, (1600),—all satires on London society; the *Poetaster*, a violent attack on two playwrights, Decker and Marston, who had incurred his enmity by condemning his earlier plays; *Volpone the Fox*, (1605), considered his finest play; *Epicene, or the Silent Woman*, (1609); the *Alchemist*, (1610); *Bartholomew Fair*, (1614); and his last, unfinished, charming pastoral play, *The Sad Shepherd*.

*Every Man in His Humour* is characteristic of our author's manner of writing comedy. Its scenes are laid in London. A rich gentleman named Knowell has a son bent on indulging in all the gallant escapades in vogue with the young men of the day. The father resolves to follow him, unseen, in order to guard him from the results of his folly. In the course of the young man's wanderings from the paternal roof, we are introduced to a City merchant living with his family over his business; to a common water-carrier, who does not hesitate to chastise his wife if she disobeys him; to a merry old magistrate dispensing justice in a homely fashion; and to a group of young swells, who fancy they are seeing life under the guidance of a needy captain, who pretends he is acquainted with people of high rank.

The play chiefly interests us to-day as an amusing picture of London life and London people of the sixteenth century.

Of Jonson's tragedies, *Sejanus*, (1603), and its companion piece, *Catiline*, (1611), are the finest examples.

They relate, in cold and frigid style, terrible stories of Roman history. Though much admired in the poet's day as learned works, they will not bear comparison with Shakespeare's tragedies.

The masques produced in the days of Jonson's poet laureateship are creations of singular beauty. They reflect their author's fertile invention and fancy as well as his learning, and are considered models of elegance and grace.

Among many charming songs, *Drink to me only with thine eyes* is still popular.

As a writer of prose, Jonson's work was not confined

to his plays; he wrote an elaborate treatise, which he published under the strange title of *Timber; or Discoveries made upon Men and Matter*. It is a fine example of Elizabethan prose.

From the poem :—

TO THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED MASTER, WILLIAM  
SHAKESPEARE, AND WHAT HE HATH LEFT US

“I therefore will begin : Soul of the age !  
The applause, delight, and wonder of our stage !  
My Shakespeare, rise ! I will not lodge thee by  
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie  
A little further, to make thee a room :  
Thou art a monument without a tomb,  
And art alive still while thy book doth live,  
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.  
That I not mix thee so my brain excuses,—  
I mean with great but disproportioned Muses ;  
For if I thought my judgment were of years,  
I should commit thee surely with thy peers,  
And tell how far thou didst our Lyly outshine,  
Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe’s mighty line.  
And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek,  
From thence to honour thee, I would not seek  
For names, but call forth thund’ring Æschylus,  
Euripides, and Sophocles to us,  
Pacuvius, Accius, him of Cordova dead,  
To life again, to hear thy buskin tread,  
And shake a stage ; or when thy socks were on,  
Leave thee alone for a comparison  
Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome  
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.  
Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show,  
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.  
He was not of an age but for all time !  
And all the Muses still were in their prime,  
When, like Apollo, he came forth to warm  
Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm !  
Nature herself was proud of his design,  
And joyed to wear the dressing of his lines,  
Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,  
As, since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.

Sweet Swan of Avon ! what a sight it were  
 To see thee in our waters yet appear,  
 And make those flights upon the banks of Thames,  
 That so did take Eliza and our James !  
 But stay, I see thee in the hemisphere  
 Advanced, and made a constellation there !  
 Shine forth, thou Star of Poets, and with rage  
 Or influence chide or cheer the drooping stage,  
 Which since thy flight from hence, hath mourned like night,  
 And despairs day but for thy volume's light."

**Francis Beaumont** (1584-1616) and **John Fletcher** (1579-1625), the joint authors of some of the finest plays of the Shakesperean school, are so inseparably linked together in literature and friendship that we cannot tell the life of one of them without including the other.

Francis Beaumont, the son of Sir Francis Beaumont, was born at Grace-Dieu in Leicestershire. He went for a short time to Oxford, and entered as student at the Inner Temple in 1600.

He was one of the coterie of literary men who held their merry meetings at the Mermaid Tavern, where he certainly made a lasting friendship with Ben Jonson, and probably met the poet who was to share his labours and fame.

John Fletcher was born at Rye in Sussex, the son of a clergyman, afterwards made Bishop of London. At the age of twelve, the boy John was sent to Cambridge ; but at his father's death, five years later, left the University in poverty.

We know nothing of his life for the next few years, till we find him in London, in 1607, the author of a play, *The Woman Hater*.

About this time the romantic friendship with Beaumont commenced. The two young men became such inseparable friends that they lived together and had clothes and everything in common.

Beaumont married in 1613, and died three years later. Fletcher worked on till his death in 1626.

Over fifty plays are assigned to the authorship of Beaumont and Fletcher ; probably only about a dozen are the result of



their literary partnership, the remainder were either written by Fletcher alone or with the assistance of some other friend.

They are almost entirely in verse. The stories are invariably interesting, and display creative power, dramatic spirit, poetic beauty and much wit and humour. It is generally thought that the graver and more thoughtful work in their joint productions belongs to Beaumont, and that Fletcher contributed the gay, brilliant and humorous pictures of life.

Beaumont and Fletcher continued the romantic drama of Shakespeare; but, in spite of the great merit of their work, their plays mark the beginning of the decay of the drama. Their verse is soft and sweet, but has none of the majesty of Shakespeare's lines. Their love of the romantic led them to take wild flights of imagination and to conceive vague, impossible characters. Some of their heroes and heroines are too good, and their villains too wicked to be lifelike.

Out of the long list of plays ascribed to them, the two finest tragedies, *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster*, are known to be from their joint pens.

Of their comedies, *A King and no King*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *Rule a Wife and have a Wife* and *The Scornful Lady* are most admired.

Tragedies and comedies alike abound in exquisite songs, and to Fletcher alone is due honour for at least one lovely pastoral poem, *The Faithful Shepherdess*. He is also thought to have collaborated with Shakespeare in the *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII*.

**John Donne** (1573-1631) was born in London (his mother was a descendant of Sir Thomas More). He studied both at Oxford and Cambridge, travelled in Italy and Spain, and became a learned and accomplished writer.

In 1610, King James persuaded him to take Holy Orders. As a clergyman he was renowned for his sermons and for his good influence over his parishioners. He would entice many from vice by showing them its ugliness, and would draw them towards virtue by persuading them of its beauty.

All his poems were composed in youth.

He wrote satires, epistles, elegies, sonnets and lyrics. Of these the lyrics are most admired to-day. They are highly imaginative passionate poems.

But Donne's influence on his own age arose from certain peculiarities of style. He was the first of the metaphysical poets. Instead of following the romantic verse of Spenser and his school he wrote intellectual poetry, and indulged in much eccentric extravagance. His new order of verse found many followers. Ben Jonson admired him, and declared him to be "the first poet in the world in some things."

### PROSE WRITERS

**Roger Ascham** (1515-1568), a distinguished teacher and writer, won fame before the reign of Queen Elizabeth. He was one of the great scholars of the Renaissance who did so much to advance learning in England.

He was born at Kirkby Wiske, in Yorkshire. As a boy he delighted in study, but his father was not rich enough to give his son a good education. Fortunately, however, for young Roger, he found a good friend in Sir Anthony Wingfield, who had him educated with his own sons, and sent him to the University of Cambridge, where he took his degree in 1534. His devotion to the new study of Greek gained him a great reputation as a classical scholar. He was made Greek Reader at St. John's College, and afterwards University Orator.

His classical studies did not, however, lead him to despise his native tongue, as was the case with so many learned men of the day. In 1545, he published his first English book, *Toxophilus*, for which Henry VIII. granted him a pension of ten pounds a year, equal to-day to about one hundred pounds.

In 1548, he was appointed tutor to the Lady Elizabeth, an arrangement of lasting happiness for both tutor and pupil. The Princess, under his wise guidance, learned to love her

Latin and Greek, and, even after she became Queen, spent so many happy hours with her old tutor that, on hearing of his death, she declared that she would rather have thrown ten thousand pounds into the sea than have lost her Ascham.

Ascham's principal works, *Toxophilus* and *The Schoolmaster*, have become English classics through their clear and simple exposition of important subjects.

*Toxophilus* is a book on archery, written in the form of a dialogue between a lover of study (Philologus) and a lover of archery (Toxophilus). The latter insists on the necessity of outdoor exercise for a studious man, and declares archery to be the best amusement for a gentleman.

*The Schoolmaster* is particularly interesting on account of its being the first important book on education in our language.

The book grew, as the author tells us, out of a discussion among the guests at one of Lord Burleigh's dinner-parties at Windsor.

Some boys at Eton had run away from school to escape a flogging, and their conduct was the subject of conversation at dinner. Ascham, who was present, condemned the harsh treatment of children then universal at school, and a friend at the table advised him to commit his thoughts to writing.

The book is in two sections: the first condemns harshness and recommends gentleness in teaching.

In his methods of teaching Ascham was a long way in advance of his day, for in the sixteenth century flogging was considered the best foundation for all knowledge.

The second part of the work treats of a new way of teaching Latin.

**Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586).**—The short romantic life of Sir Philip Sidney is one of the most interesting stories of Elizabethan heroes.

The eldest son of Sir Henry Sidney and nephew of Elizabeth's favourite Lord Leicester, Philip was born at Penshurst, Kent. He was educated at Shrewsbury School and at Oxford, and afterwards travelled in France and Italy,

after the fashion of the day, to complete his studies. He was present in Paris at the terrible massacre of Protestants, known as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and hid in the house of Sir Francis Walsingham.

On his return to England he appeared at Queen Elizabeth's Court, where his handsome figure, courtly manners and many accomplishments made him a great favourite.

He was sent on several foreign embassies; but his honesty in defending his father from the attacks made against him as Lord-Deputy of Ireland, and his fearlessness in opposing the Queen's proposed marriage with the Duke of Anjou, brought him into disgrace with the Queen; for Elizabeth always demanded submission and flattery from her courtiers.

Sidney retired to Wilton on a long visit to his sister, and, whilst there, wrote the romance *Arcadia*, by which he is best known to-day.

In 1580, he returned to Court, wrote his *Defence of Poesy*, and poured forth his love sorrows in the beautiful sonnets *Astrophel and Stella*.

He longed to engage in some great enterprise for his country, but amid the many jealousies of Court life was unable to gain his desire. At length the command was given that Sidney should accompany his uncle Leicester to the Netherlands to fight in the Protestant cause against the Spaniards.

It proved a disastrous expedition, and Sidney received his death wound in a desperate fight outside the walls of Zutphen.

The last act of his life was to give up the draught of water a friend had brought to slake his burning thirst to a dying soldier, who he thought had more need of it.

His chief work, the *Arcadia*, is a long love story, in prose intermixed with poems. It was written to please his sister, and not printed till after his death.

It recounts the adventures and love-making of two young Greeks wrecked on the coast of Sparta.

Both are rescued, and one is taken to the delightful pastoral



land of Arcadia, where the chief incidents of the story take place.

In the *Defence of Poesy* Sidney, in clear and simple prose, claims for poetry the highest place in literature. He criticises the feeble writers of verse in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, who wrote imitations of foreign poetry. Spenser had just published his first poem, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, and he is named with Chaucer, Sackville, and Surrey (Shakespeare was not then known to fame) as the only great English poets. Sidney's sonnets tell in sweet melodious verse of his love for Penelope, daughter of Lord Essex.

**Sir Walter Raleigh** (1552-1618).—Among all the romantic heroes of Elizabethan days no greater can be found than Sir Walter Raleigh. His life was devoted to the service of his country, and, when we consider how many daring adventures were crowded into it, we marvel that this renowned soldier, courtier, and explorer should also rank as a man of letters. Yet Raleigh combined all these qualifications, and would be remembered to-day for his prose works and graceful poems, even if his long adventurous life and sad death did not place him among our favourite heroes.

He belonged to an ancient Devonshire family and was born at the old family seat of Hayes, near Budleigh. He was educated at Oxford University. On leaving college he embraced a soldier's career, and fought with great bravery in the Huguenot war in France and in England's attack on Spain. In 1580, we find him fighting in Ireland to put down a rebellion, and distinguishing himself by many gallant acts.

The story of his gaining the Queen's favour by throwing down his cloak over a muddy place in the street, in order that she might pass without soiling her shoes, may not be true, but it was no doubt by some such gracious act that he gained royal favour.

For a time he was a great favourite at Court, where his tall, handsome figure and manly bearing were much admired; when, however, he presumed to fall in love with and marry

a Maid of Honour, the Queen was very angry and sent him to the Tower. After her forgiveness had been obtained, he engaged in many enterprises of conquest and discovery in the New World, bringing home to England many unknown things, including potatoes and tobacco.

Grants of land and other favours were given him by his royal mistress, and at the close of her reign he was rich and prosperous. Amidst all his other work, he found time for reading, and was an ardent student of Spenser's verse.

On the accession of King James, Raleigh's days of happiness were over. He had many enemies at Court, and they poisoned the King's mind against him. His impetuous, hasty temper also gave cause of offence, for no doubt he often spoke and acted unwisely. He was accused of treason and, after a most unfair trial, was sentenced to death. This sentence was afterwards changed into one of perpetual imprisonment, and for thirty years Raleigh was confined in the Tower.

During these years he wrote his most famous work, *A History of the World*. In 1616, he was released on the condition that he would undertake an expedition to discover the gold mines which he believed to exist in South America.

The voyage was unsuccessful, and, after passing through terrible dangers, Raleigh had to return to England without having accomplished anything.

At this time James was professing friendship for the Spaniards, whom Raleigh had so often fought against; and, to please them, the King gave orders that he should be beheaded on the old charge of treason, for which he had been so many years in prison.

His *History of the World* is a long work, though unfinished. It gives a learned account of the world's history from earliest times.

In style it is very unequal; some passages are of great beauty, others very monotonous records of events.

Raleigh's other works include an interesting book of geographical adventure, called *Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana*, and numerous poems.

**Richard Hooker** (1554-1600) deserves a worthy place in our literature for two reasons : he is one of our greatest writers on theology, and one of the first Englishmen to write clear and stately prose. Born at Exeter, at an early age he showed a keen love for learning, and was by his uncle's influence introduced to Bishop Jewell of Salisbury. The Bishop, partly at his own expense, sent him to Oxford University. Hooker was a most diligent student ; he took his M.A. degree and became a Fellow of his college.

In 1581, he entered the Church, and not long after was appointed to preach the sermon on a certain Sunday at St. Paul's Cross. This was considered a great honour, but the young student was so modest and diffident that it appeared to him only as a terrible ordeal. The journey to London was accomplished with difficulty in very rainy weather, and the young simple-minded clergyman was lodged and comforted by a scheming widow. She contrived that he should marry her daughter, "a clownish, silly" person, who proved to be both a shrew and a scold.

Hooker's married life was anything but a happy one. In the quiet country living to which he had been appointed, his friends found him tending the sheep or rocking the cradle and trying at the same time to read his beloved books. On the recommendation of an old pupil—Sandys, then Bishop of London—he was appointed preacher at the famous Temple Church. It was his duty to preach there in the morning ; in the afternoon a Puritan named Travers filled the pulpit.

Travers was the more popular preacher, but his teaching did not please the Archbishop of Canterbury, so he was dismissed. A controversy ensued, in which Hooker was compelled to take part. At length he begged to be allowed to retire into the country to devote himself to the work of writing a book which would explain the doctrine of the Church of England.

In 1591, he received the living of Boscombe, near Salisbury, where he wrote four of his proposed eight books of *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

He was afterwards made Rector of Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury, and here he quietly worked for the remaining years of his life. His works were already widely known, but fame in no way changed the gentle country clergyman.

He died before his work was completed, in 1600, from the effects of a chill, leaving a great deal of writing in manuscript. Some of his unpublished writings were destroyed by his widow.

*The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (published 1594-1597) is still regarded as a masterpiece of English eloquence.

Hooker's object was to defend the Church of England from the attacks of the Puritans by a calm and careful investigation of Church doctrine.

He is always moderate in his arguments, seeking to persuade, not to force people to accept his views. His style is grave, clear and dignified, and adorned with many poetic expressions.

**Sir Francis Bacon** (1561-1626).

"If parts allure thee, think how Bacon shined—  
The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind."

So wrote the poet Pope in the eighteenth century, and perhaps justly.

This great philosopher, and fine prose writer, lives to-day through his works; we cannot admire his character.

Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam and Viscount of St. Albans, was born at York House in the Strand, London, and was the younger son of Sir Nicholas Bacon. With his elder brother, Anthony, he was brought up, until he was twelve years old, under the stern guidance of his mother. His father was often honoured by a visit from Queen Elizabeth, who was much amused by the precocious wit of young Francis, and was wont to call him her "Little Lord Keeper."

In 1573, he was sent to Cambridge University, and three years later began to study law at Gray's Inn. His work was, however, soon interrupted to visit Paris as attendant on the Ambassador, Sir Amias Paulet. At the French Court he



learnt at least one bad habit—the love of display. In after years his desire for fine clothes, furniture and other luxuries led him into debt.

On his father's death, in 1579, he returned to England. With very little money, but a great intellect, he settled down to study hard at law, resolved on making a great name.

He entered Parliament, sought the patronage of Lord Burleigh unsuccessfully, and therefore attached himself to the Queen's favourite, the Earl of Essex, who tried to procure for him the office of Solicitor-General. Failing in this, the Earl presented him with a fine estate at Twickenham.

When the great Earl fell into disgrace, Bacon at first stood by him, but, afterwards, was one of the chief accusers at the trial, which ended in his patron being sentenced to death.

Bacon gained his greatest renown in the early years of James I.'s reign. He was appointed Attorney-General in 1613, and was made Lord Chancellor of England in 1618.

This latter high office he held for three years, and showed himself ever ready to fulfil the wishes of the King, whether they were in accordance with the law or not. James I. could not, however, shield him from the wrath of his enemies. He was accused, we hope not always justly, of taking bribes and of giving judgments which were not in accordance with law, in order to please great people.

The House of Commons, in 1621, brought twenty-two charges of bribery against him. Tried by the House of Lords, he pleaded guilty, and was dismissed from his offices, and sentenced to pay a fine of forty thousand pounds and be imprisoned during the King's pleasure.

James set him free after ten days, and forgave him the fine ; but the sentence was a terrible disgrace to fall upon the greatest lawyer in the land. The remaining years of Bacon's life were devoted to literary work and scientific research.

In March, 1626, he caught cold, through stopping on the roadside to stuff a fowl with snow, in order to discover whether cold would not preserve the flesh as well as the salt which was then used. We have since learned to appreciate

Bacon's experiment, for our present system of preserving meat and poultry by freezing is only a development of his idea. He was taken to the house of a friend, where he died.

In his will, he wrote, "For my name and memory, I leave it to men's charitable speeches, and to foreign nations and the next ages," and time has proved that he estimated justly his work.

As a philosopher he holds a foremost place. His great doctrine, that man must study science by observing Nature and studying her laws, has had untold influence on scientific discoverers. Many of the scientific truths we know to-day we may thank Bacon for, because he put all students on the right road for acquiring knowledge.

But it is as a great English prose writer that we honour him in literature; the works which he laboured at in Latin, and which he thought would be most esteemed in future ages, are little read to-day; it is his English *Essays* and *The Advancement of Learning* which still adorn our libraries.

The *Essays*, at first ten in number, published in 1597, were enlarged and added to as years went by till they reached a total of sixty-eight. In clear and concise language Bacon discusses in them many of the problems of life. Only one great essayist had lived before him, and he was a Frenchman—Montaigne by name. Montaigne's *Essays*, published in France in 1580, were translated into English, and were doubtless read by Bacon. They may have suggested this form of writing to him.

*The Story of the New Atlantis*, which gives in fine descriptive language an account of an imaginary land far beyond the seas, and a *History of Henry VIII.'s Reign* are both interesting books.

*The Advancement of Learning*, his greatest English work, published in 1605, gives a complete account of English knowledge in Bacon's time, and points out many defects.

During the last years of his life he endeavoured to carry out the great project of giving a complete account of all

knowledge in a long series of works, written in Latin. The first volume was founded on *The Advancement of Learning*. He then, in the *Novum Organum*, set forth and explained his views on philosophy. He did not live to complete his work, but the parts which were written were of great importance to students of science.

From *The New Atlantis*.—

“We sailed from Peru, where we had continued for the space of one whole year, for China and Japan, by the South Sea, taking with us victuals for twelve months, and had good winds from the east, though soft and weak, for five months’ space and more, but then the wind came about, and settled in the west for many days, so as we could make little or no way, and were sometimes in purpose to turn back.

\* \* \* \* \*

“And it came to pass that the next day about evening we saw within a kenning before us, towards the north, as it were, thicker clouds, which did put us in some hope of land; knowing how that part of the South Sea was utterly unknown, and might have islands or continents that hitherto were not come to light. Wherefore we bent our course thither, where we saw the appearance of land all that night; and in the dawning of the next day we might plainly discern that it was a land flat to our sight, and full of bosage, which made it show the more dark: and after an hour and a half’s sailing we entered into a good haven, being the port of a fair city, not great indeed, but well built, and that gave a pleasant view from the sea. And we, thinking every minute long till we were on land, came close to the shore, and offered to land; but straightways we saw divers of the people with bastons in their hand, as it were forbidding us to land, yet without any cries or fierceness, but only as warning us off by signs that they made. Whereupon, being not a little discomfited, we were advising with ourselves what we should do. During which time there made forth to us a small boat with about eight persons in it, whereof one of them had in his hand a tipstaff of a yellow cane, tipped at both ends with blue, who made aboard our ship without any show of distrust at all. And when he saw one of our number present himself somewhat afore the rest, he drew forth a little scroll of parchment, somewhat yellower than our parchment, and

shining like the leaves of writing-tables, but otherwise soft and flexible, and delivered it to our foremost man. In which scroll were written, in ancient Hebrew, and in ancient Greek, and in good Latin of the school, and in Spanish, these words, 'Land ye not, none of you, and provide to be gone from this coast within sixteen days, except you have further time given you : meanwhile, if you want fresh water, or victual, or help for your sick, or that your ship needeth repair, write down your wants, and you shall have that which belongeth to mercy.' This scroll was signed with a stamp of cherubim's wings, not spread, but hanging downwards, and by them a cross. This being delivered, the officer returned, and left only a servant with us to receive our answer."



## VI.

# THE AGE OF MILTON

(ABOUT 1625 TO 1660).

THE glorious Elizabethan age may be said to have closed with the death of Bacon. In the period we are about to consider there is no crowd of writers of genius to pour forth beautiful poetry or majestic prose such as we have seen created during the reigns of Queen Bess and her cousin James. There are, indeed, individual men of high genius; the poet who gives the title to our chapter and the few eminent prose writers, who were his contemporaries, must always brilliantly illuminate the years of King Charles and the Commonwealth; but, apart from their isolated work, there is little, either in poetry or prose, that will compare favourably with the productions of the preceding era.

This decline in literature may be partly accounted for by the troublous history of the times. The nation had greatly changed since the days of Queen Elizabeth. The spirit of adventure, the love of romantic stories, the curiosity of a people, who had only lately discovered how much there was to learn in the world, were gone, and in their place a new spirit of thought and action had arisen.

The two subjects which filled men's minds in the seventeenth century were Political and Religious Freedom. In the doctrine of the right of kings to the implicit obedience of their subjects, and in the demand of the Church for supreme authority in all religious matters, the discussions of the time centred.

These ultimately split the nation into two camps, the Cavalier and the Roundhead, and made as deep an impression

on the literature of the country as the Civil War did on its history.

The Cavaliers represented all the gaiety, romance and much of the folly of the age. There were men of talent among them, but on the downfall of the king's cause their chances of becoming famous were gone; they either fled to the Continent to share the hardships of the English Court, or led lives of seclusion at home.

The Puritans, or Roundheads, were above all things a serious people; to them love-poetry, play-acting and all worldly pleasures were sins to be put down with a strong hand. Cromwell and the Puritan party neglected and discouraged every form of writing that was not religious, and no doubt it was partly owing to this neglect that, with certain exceptions, the works produced during this period do not reach high literary rank.

**Poetry.**—The greatest of all the exceptions is Milton. In his own time his learning and work for the Puritan cause were fully appreciated, but he had but small repute as poet; it was left to succeeding generations to reverence his genius and admire his magnificent verse. He belongs to no particular school of poetry, for he combined the great qualities of the Elizabethans, their creative imagination and natural beauty, with a deep classical learning none of them possessed. His early poems, composed before the Civil War commenced, are beautiful examples of lyric verse; but it is his great epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, written in magnificent blank verse, which has gained for him immortal fame.

This masterpiece was not finished till 1665, but it must be included in this chapter, for Milton belongs entirely to this age of religious and political warfare. He has nothing in common with the writers whom Charles II. delighted to honour.

Apart from this giant among the poets, the verse of these years is chiefly interesting because it serves as a link between two widely different eras—the imaginative, romantic Elizabethan, and the prosaic artificial poetry which became popular after the Restoration.

Many of the poets of Charles I.'s reign followed blindly in the footsteps of their predecessors, but with little of their inspiration or genius. The general characteristics of their work are an exaggerated and extravagant style and deplorably bad metre.

The best work is seen in Lyrical Poetry. Robert Herrick wrote in his *Hesperides* some very delightful verse; and the names of Thomas Carew, Richard Crashaw, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Richard Lovelace, Sir John Suckling, William Habington, Edmund Waller, Abraham Cowley, Andrew Marvell, George Wither and Francis Quarles, are remembered in connection with many beautiful lyrics.

And these names by no means include all the writers of melodious verse who poured forth songs of religion and popular ballads on love, constancy, battle or devotion to the king. This kind of song-writing flourished for a short time after the Restoration, but perished when the political ballad came into fashion, and people preferred doggerel verse on the sins and shortcomings of public men to the charming lyrics for which the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are alike renowned.

Outside lyrical verse, English poets produced little worthy of remembrance. The excesses and affectations of Donne were carried to most absurd lengths by his followers. Then came a reaction and the beginning of a new school of verse. Four poets, Edmund Waller, Sir John Denham, Abraham Cowley, and Sir William Davenant, are connected with this movement.

Waller, whose early poems date from 1623, was the first to recognise the faults of his contemporaries and to seek to avoid them, by copying the Latin and Greek poets and adopting strict laws for the construction of verse. He remodelled the heroic metre of Chaucer, and gave it the form which was later adopted by Dryden and the whole of the classical school of poets.

In 1642, Denham was converted to the new order of verse, and was presently followed by Cowley (who introduced the Pindaric Ode) and Davenant.

Neither of the four writers was a great poet. Their cold, smooth verse, however, was acceptable on account of its correctness, and it had a direct influence on the succeeding age. "They were the first (poets) that made writing easily an art"; and therefore they illustrate the transition from the natural school of poets of Elizabethan days to the classical artificial age of Dryden.

Of the **Drama** there is very little to tell. Massinger, Ford, and Shirley were the only remaining writers of Elizabethan days, and no new playwrights appear worthy of remembrance.

In 1642, all the theatres were closed by order of the Long Parliament, and, six years later, a special Act ordered that all actors who dared to disobey this order should be publicly whipped, and all the spectators of their shows fined. Strolling players still managed to exist, but the work of the dramatist was gone. Only one new work marked these years of Puritan rule. It was an opera, *The Siege of Rhodes*, the work of Davenant, and was first presented to a London audience, under the guise of a musical entertainment, in 1656.

Thus the great dramatic art, which in less than fifty years had been brought to such perfection by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, degenerated almost to extinction.

In **Prose** little of importance appeared during the early years of Charles I.'s reign; but from about 1640 more attention was paid to prose writing. Important works on theology, philosophy and history were produced during the Commonwealth, besides a mass of political and religious pamphlets and many sermons, all interesting as reflecting the character and spirit of the times.

With very few exceptions, all the prose writers have great defects in style. Long and involved sentences, slovenly construction and a want of clearness are their leading characteristics, and these are only partially atoned for by the many passages of great eloquence scattered up and down their works.

**Theology.**—Jeremy Taylor was the greatest of the many divines who were authors as well as preachers. His *Great Exemplar* and *Holy Living and Holy Dying* express his deep



religious devotion in most eloquent language, and are written in a spirit of charity rarely possessed by his contemporaries.

The works of William Chillingworth and John Pearson among Churchmen, and Richard Baxter among Nonconformists, are also worthy examples of vigorous prose.

**Philosophy.**—One important work in political philosophy, the *Leviathan*, published during the Commonwealth, gained for its author, Thomas Hobbes, a high place among the philosophers.

In **History** the Earl of Clarendon is a representative figure. His *History of the Great Rebellion*, which he commenced in 1641, is the only record we have of these eventful years of the overthrow of the monarchy from the pen of a man of literary taste, who wrote from contemporary knowledge.

Thomas Fuller, a divine, is better remembered to-day as a witty historian than as a theologian. His *Church History of Britain* and the *Worthies of England* are important works; nor must we forget a *History of the Parliament of 1640*, by Thomas May, and the *Chronicles of the Kings of England*, by Sir Richard Baker.

Among **Miscellaneous Writers** the quaint fantastic style and great learning of Sir Thomas Browne are fully set forth in his *Enquiry into Public Errors* and *The Urn Burial*. Robert Burton contributed a book of great learning and wit, the *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). James Harrington described an ideal commonwealth in his *Oceana*; and Izaak Walton, in his *Compleat Angler*, pleases us to-day as he did the people of the seventeenth century, by his delightful treatment of an interesting subject.

**Letter-writing**, as a form of literature, may be said to have begun with James Howell's *Familiar Letters* ("Epistolæ Ho-Elianae"); and the character sketches of John Earle (*Micro-cosmographie*) and other writers give half-comic, half-serious, pictures of noted men.

In these lighter works, together with many translations of French romances, the people found relief from the long and sober discussions of the Puritan divines, who, during the

Commonwealth, held religious services up and down the land at all times and seasons.

Amid a mass of **Pamphlets** the *Eikon Basilike*, published a few weeks after Charles I.'s death, was the most read and talked about.

This memoir, the work of an anonymous writer, personating the king, described most pathetically the royal prisoner's trials and sufferings. It made a deep impression on the nation, many thought it was from the king's own hand. Public feeling was for the time strongly aroused against those members of the Government who had brought about his death, and their defence was entrusted to the master hand of Milton, who, throughout the days of the Commonwealth, forsook the poetic muse to write vigorous prose.

His answer, called *Eikonoclastes*, together with his other pamphlets, are in many respects magnificent examples of prose writing.

**Earliest Form of the Newspaper.** — The occasional pamphlet of Elizabethan days developed during the Commonwealth into a journal appearing regularly, and somewhat resembling our modern newspaper. Foreign news was first published in a weekly paper in 1622; but the proper era of the newspaper, as a record of home news, commenced in 1641, when a daily paper was started which recorded the doings of the Long Parliament. These publications prove that the reading public was gradually increasing. In Queen Elizabeth's time the mass of the people read very little, but went to the play or to church, to hear what authors or preachers had to tell them; in Cromwell's day they still derived much of their knowledge from the sermons of famous divines, but also began to read for themselves in pamphlets and newspapers, and even books.

The days of the Modern Libraries had commenced, so that the reading of expensive books was no longer a luxury reserved for those members of the richer classes who were studiously inclined. The British Museum Library and the Bodleian Library at Oxford both date from James I.'s reign,

but many important local libraries in London and some of the leading cities of the kingdom were founded during the years of Charles I. and the Commonwealth. They were mostly started by private individuals, and supported by private donations.

It has taken centuries to bring public libraries within the reach of every citizen, but in the good work started by the seventeenth century philanthropists we see the beginning of popular reading.

For a long time all books were read in the library itself; the circulating library did not come into existence till the eighteenth century, and had its origin in the custom of booksellers to allow people to read new books in their shops on the payment of a small subscription.

The increase in the reading public is the only step forward in literature that we have to record during these tumultuous years in our history. The literary productions were, as we have pointed out, vastly inferior to those of the preceding age. The drama practically dead; the poets, excepting Milton and the lyrical poets, feeble, and nearly all silent during the Commonwealth; it is in the prose alone we note memorable work, and much of this even is marred by defects of style.

There was, however, during the latter years of our period an undercurrent of literary work going on abroad amid the little band of Cavalier exiles who followed the fortunes of the Stuarts in France. They were for the time silent students in a foreign land, learning the new subjects, the new manner of writing, which, in Waller and his early followers, had already shown signs of life in England.

Those years of exile were years of preparation for the changes in English literature which were introduced at the Restoration.

## POETS

**John Milton** (1608-1674), the greatest English epic poet, and the only poet of any nationality who has composed an immortal poem from Bible sources, was born in London, at a house in Bread Street, Cheapside.

His father was a prosperous scrivener, a man of culture and a musician, who belonged to an old Oxford family, and had come up to London, after being disinherited for his Puritan tendencies.

His son John, whilst still a boy, displayed much skill in writing verse. He was carefully educated and sent, in 1625, to Christ's College, Cambridge, where, on account of his somewhat feminine beauty, refined taste and moral life, he was nicknamed "the lady of Christ's." He gained some repute at his college for his Latin verse and for his authorship of a beautiful ode *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*.

After taking his degree, in 1632, Milton went to reside with his father, at Horton, in Bucks. Here he continued to work, from early morning till late into the night, reading Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and English literature, and writing the five immortal lyrical poems *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Arcades*, *Comus*, and *Lycidas*.

Six years later, he paid a short but happy visit to that land of the poets, Italy, and formed lasting friendships with some of the leading Italians of the day.

News of the Civil War, which had broken out between Charles I. and the Scotch, brought him back to England; for, he says, "I thought it base to be travelling for mine own ease and amusement when my fellow-countrymen at home were fighting for liberty."

He settled in London, at a house in Aldersgate Street, devoting himself to the education of his widowed sister's children, forming plans for future poems, probably even for the great epic which crowned his life.

The meeting of the Long Parliament and the commencement of the Civil War brought about great changes in our poet's life. He was drawn into the turmoil of politics, and for the twenty years between 1640 and 1660 gave up his poet's dreams to champion the Puritan cause in vigorous prose pamphlets.

His private life was likewise tumultuous. In 1643, he married a young lady, Mary Powell, who proved a very



unsuitable wife. Her family were ardent Cavaliers, living in Oxfordshire, fond of gaiety and amusements, and little likely to please the grave, scholarly Milton. After a few weeks' trial of wedded life in London, the bride went on a visit to her old home and refused to return to her husband.

They were, however, reconciled some two years later; and the poet's London home sheltered many of his wife's family after the overthrow of the Royalist cause.

In 1649, Milton was appointed Secretary of Foreign Tongues, with a salary of £290 a year.

Outside his official work his pen was ever busy defending the Commonwealth, in English and in Latin, from the attacks of Royalist champions both at home and abroad. His home life was during these years marked by many afflictions.

In 1652, his wife died, leaving him with three little girls to bring up, and about the same time he lost his eyesight.

Two or three years later he married again; but his second wife, to whom he appears to have been deeply attached, died fifteen months after their union.

The Restoration brought gloom and terror to the Puritan poet who had written such powerful attacks on the monarchy. He was for some time in hiding, but at length the intercession of friends prevailed. His pamphlets were burned by the hangman, but the writer was allowed to retire into private life. Politics were deserted for ever when the poet removed to a poor home near Bunhill Fields. From henceforth he was free to devote himself to the glorious poem which must have been his chief solace at this, to him, sad time.

His domestic life was still far from happy; his daughters, whose duty it was to read and write for their blind and possibly stern father, proved unwilling and impatient helpers. Peace was restored to the household at the poet's third marriage; and the remainder of his life, though passed in poor circumstances, was solaced by the affection of a few steadfast friends.

There is, however, something very tragic in this solitary genius, "blind, old and lonely," living in the midst of a world

with which he could have no sympathy. He had devoted his life to the Puritan cause, and now it appeared crushed to death in the excessive frivolity and love of pleasure of a profligate court. He was a man of the past, and then despised, age, pouring fourth poetry of undying fame, but living unnoticed among a vastly inferior race of poets, who were absorbed in inventing a new order of verse. Waller and Cowley were popular heroes; Milton's circle of admirers was very small; yet to-day it is Milton who holds a high place among the mightiest poets of the world, whilst Waller and Cowley are almost forgotten. He died in 1674, and was interred in St. Giles', Cripplegate. Of his somewhat stern, exacting and bigoted, though undoubtedly in many respects noble, character, writers have formed different estimates; of his poetic genius all are convinced.

Whatever kind of poetry he chooses, lyric, elegy or epic, he is always inspired by noble thoughts and sublime feelings; there is only one thing lacking, a sense of humour.

His blank verse has been "the model and despair" of all who have attempted to follow him. It possesses the charm of the best Elizabethan verse, tempered by a perfect artistic treatment, the outcome of his long study of the classics.

Milton's work falls into three periods:

The first includes the lyrical poems written before 1638.

The *Hymn on the Nativity* was written during his college days at Cambridge.

*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are two lovely lyrics and companion poems, representing the poet's life at Horton. *L'Allegro* shows him in his cheerful, mirthful moods; *Il Penseroso* in his pensive and thoughtful moments. *Arcades* is a fragment of a masque, consisting of three beautiful songs. *Comus* is an exquisite masque, written to please a friend, and acted at Ludlow Castle by the children of the Earl of Bridgewater. It relates the story of a beautiful lady who is lost in a wood, and falls under the spells of a magician called Comus.

Her brothers are warned by a friendly spirit (disguised as a shepherd) of her troubles, and they ultimately rescue her.

*Lycidas* is a fine ode written on the death of a college friend, named King.

The second period of the poet's work falls to the days of the Commonwealth, and consists, with the exception of a few sonnets, of prose pamphlets. They are chiefly vigorous attacks on the Church and the Monarchy, and, whilst containing many grand, impressive passages, are oftentimes prejudiced and always uncharitable.

The most noted are the *Areopagitica*, 1644, an eloquent pleading for the freedom of the Press; *A Tract on Education*; the *Eikonoclastes*, 1649 (a reply to the *Eikon Basilike* published in defence of Charles I.), in which Milton sought to vindicate the action of the Parliament in beheading the king; *Defence of the People of England*, 1651, a famous Latin treatise written in reply to Salmasius, a great scholar of Leyden, who had espoused the cause of the Cavaliers.

The third period includes the great religious epic, *Paradise Lost*, in which Milton reached the summit of his power. The moral grandeur of his Bible theme, the majestic music of the blank verse, have received the homage of the greatest critics.

The poem is divided into twelve books, and treats of the great and universal subject of all time, the struggle between good and evil.

In glorious verse the fall of Satan is opened up to our imagination, the Paradise of Genesis beautifully portrayed. Then the fall of Adam and Eve is described, and the poem closes with the hope of their redemption. It was probably commenced in 1657 and finished in 1665. Sold to a publisher for five pounds, it was first printed in 1667.

Some time before its publication, Milton showed his manuscript to a friend named Elgood, who remarked, "Thou hast said much about Paradise Lost, but what about Paradise Regained?" This comment led the poet to write of the Temptation and Victory of Christ in *Paradise Regained*, a second epic poem of solemn beauty and majesty, but not considered equal either in style or interest to his first epic.

It was published in 1671, and the same year saw the

publication of *Samson Agonistes*, a drama interspersed with choruses, after the manner of the old Greek tragedies, and written in strict conformity to classical laws.

In Samson's captivity and revenge over the Philistines, the poet was no doubt thinking of his own blindness and the afflictions of the Puritans during the profligate days of the Restoration.

From *Il Penseroso* :—

“ But let my due feet never fail  
To walk the studious cloister's pale,  
And love the high-embowed roof,  
With antique pillars massy proof,  
And storied windows richly light,  
Casting a dim religious light :  
There let the pealing organ blow,  
To the full-voiced quire below,  
In service high and anthems clear,  
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,  
Dissolve me into extasies,  
And bring all heaven before mine eyes.  
And may at last my weary age  
Find out the peaceful hermitage,  
The hairy gown and mossy cell,  
Where I may sit and rightly spell  
Of every star that heaven doth shew,  
And every herb that sips the dew ;  
Till old experience do attain  
To something like prophetic strain.  
These pleasures, Melancholy, give,  
And I with thee will choose to live.”

From *Paradise Lost* :—

“ And chiefly thou, O Spirit, thou dost prefer  
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,  
Instruct me, for thou know'st ; thou from the first  
Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,  
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss,  
And mad'st it pregnant : what in me is dark,  
Illumine ; what is low, raise and support ;  
That to the height of this great argument  
I may assert eternal Providence,  
And justify the ways of God to men.”



**Robert Herrick** (1591-1634), one of the most delightful English lyrical poets, was the son of a London goldsmith. He was left an orphan at an early age, but was well educated by his guardian and sent to Cambridge University, where he took his M.A. degree in 1620.

Coming up to London soon after, he joined the band of authors who sat at the feet of Ben Jonson, and gained for himself some reputation as a poet. In 1629, his mother died, and the same year the son took Holy Orders and was presented with a country living near Totnes in Devonshire, where he spent the greater part of his life. He often bemoaned the loss of the excitement and gaiety of the city, but his verse proves him to have been a keen appreciator of the country and a sympathetic friend of the simple village folk.

At the overthrow of the monarchy, Herrick was deprived of his living, and he spent the years of the Commonwealth in London. At the Restoration, he returned to his Devonshire home, and died there in 1634.

He is the only poet of the period who appears to have been uninfluenced by the stirring events of his day. His one volume of verse contained the *Hesperides*, dated 1633, and *The Noble Numbers*, dated 1634. The former is a collection of love songs, fairy poems, odes, epigrams and lyrical verse of every kind. All (excepting the epigrams, which are poor and sometimes coarse) are fresh and natural, rich in delightful pictures of country life, rustic ceremonies, and rural sights expressed in sweet, melodious verse. They rank with the highest examples of English lyrics.

*The Noble Numbers* are religious poems, not generally as good as the *Hesperides*, though such examples as *The Litany* and the *Dirge of Jephthah's Daughter* are justly considered masterpieces of their kind.

**Edmund Waller** (1605-1687), was the first in point of time of the four poets (Waller, Denham, Cowley and Davenant) who are remembered to-day in literature; not by reason of their being great poets, but because they were the first English writers of the classical school of verse.

In his own day Waller was esteemed the greatest of English poets; his reputation has since steadily declined, and he is now only remembered for one lovely song, *Go, lovely Rose*, and for his remodelling of the heroic couplet of Chaucer.

A modern critic has said, "Waller captured English poetry on the wing, and shut it up in a cage for a hundred and fifty years."

Specimen of the heroic couplet as used by Waller in the *Battle of the Summer's Islands*.

"Such is the mould that the blest tenant feeds  
On precious fruits, and pays his rent in weeds;  
With candied plantains, and the juicy pine,  
On choicest melons and sweet grapes they dine,  
And with potatoes fat their wanton swine;  
Nature these cates with such a lavish hand  
Pours out among them, that our coarser land  
Tastes of that bounty, and does cloth return,  
Which not for warmth but ornament is worn  
For the kind spring which but salutes us here,  
Inhabits these and courts them all the year."

**Abraham Cowley** (1618–1667), the son of a London stationer, enjoyed a high reputation as poet in his own day and throughout the whole of the succeeding century.

He is now chiefly remembered as the inventor of a kind of poetic composition, the Pindaric Ode, in which he sought to imitate a great lyrical poet of ancient Greece named Pindar.

This style of verse became very popular in the age of Dryden.

As a prose writer, Cowley gained, after the Restoration, some renown by his essays, which are simpler in style than most of the prose writings of the time.

Specimen of Pindaric Ode as invented by Cowley:—

#### BRUTUS

"Excellent Brutus, of all human race  
The best, till nature was improved by grace,  
Till men above themselves faith raised more  
Than reason above beasts before;

Virtue was thy life's centre, and from thence  
Did silently and constantly dispense  
    The gentle, vigorous influence  
To all the wide and fair circumference :  
And all the parts upon it lean'd so easily,  
Obey'd the mighty force so willingly,  
That none could discord or disorder see  
    In all their contrariety ;  
Each had his motion natural and free,  
And the whole no more moved than the whole world could be."

## PROSE WRITERS

**Jeremy Taylor** (1613-1667).—"This great prelate had the good humour of a gentleman, the eloquence of an orator, the fancy of a poet, the acuteness of a schoolman, the profoundness of a philosopher, the wisdom of a chancellor, the reason of an angel, and the piety of a saint," said a friend of this noted divine.

The son of a Cambridge tailor, he at thirteen years of age entered Caius College as a sizar.

He was renowned at the University for his intelligence and studious habits. He graduated B.A. and was admitted to Holy Orders.

His great learning attracted the attention of Archbishop Laud, who made him his chaplain and induced the authorities at Oxford to present him with a fellowship.

In 1638, Taylor was appointed Rector of Uppingham, and soon after produced his first literary work.

Being a strong Churchman and faithful adherent of the throne, he fled to Wales after the downfall of the Royalist cause, and was three times imprisoned during the Commonwealth for his writings.

In 1658, the Earl of Conway gave him a lectureship at Lisburne, and, at the Restoration, he was made Bishop of Down and Connor, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dublin, and a member of the Irish Privy Council.

His last years were clouded by domestic troubles and by the

acts of some of his parishioners, staunch Presbyterians, who mocked at their Bishop's gentle teaching.

He died at Lisburne and was buried in the cathedral at Dromore.

The beauty of Taylor's literary work is enhanced by the holiness of his life. He had a large and charitable heart, and preached toleration in religion to a most bigoted age.

As a writer on religious subjects he stands unrivalled.

His works, written chiefly during the years of his seclusion, are worthy monuments of English prose. They, one and all, display dazzling eloquence, vast learning and deep devotion. Like other writers of the age, Taylor indulges in very long sentences and exhibits at times a looseness of grammatical construction.

His most noted works are *The Liberty of Prophesying* (1647), in which he declares that religious toleration and righteousness of life are more important than correct theology. *The Life of Christ; or The Great Exemplar* (1650); and *Holy Living and Holy Dying* (1650-51), a work of sacred devotion which has become a classic.

Specimen of Taylor's style :—

#### ON PRAYER

“Anger is a perfect alienation of the mind from prayer, and therefore is contrary to that attention which presents our prayers in a right line to God. For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings, till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over; and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing, as if it had learned music and motion from an angel, as he passed sometimes through the air, about his ministries here below. So is the prayer of a good man: when his affairs have required business, and his business was matter of discipline, and his discipline was to pass upon a sinning person, or had a design of charity, his duty met with the infirmi-



ties of a man, and anger was its instrument; and the instrument became stronger than the prime agent, and raised a tempest, and overruled the man; and then his prayer was broken, and his thoughts were troubled, and his words went up towards a cloud; and his thoughts pulled them back again, and made them without intention; and the good man sighs for his infirmity, but must be content to lose that prayer, and he must recover it when his anger is removed, and his spirit is becalmed, made even as the brow of Jesus, and smooth like the heart of God; and then it ascends to heaven upon the wings of the holy dove, and dwells with God, till it returns, like the useful bee, loaden with a blessing and the dew of heaven."

**Thomas Fuller** (1608–1661), divine, historian and wit, was born at Aldwinkle, in Northamptonshire.

He was a boy of great promise, and was sent at an early age to the University of Cambridge, where he graduated in 1625.

Taking Holy Orders, he was made a Prebendary of Salisbury, and, in 1634, was appointed to the Rectory of Broadwindsor, in Dorsetshire. Here he married happily, faithfully fulfilled his duties as clergyman, and wrote his first important work, a *History of the Holy War* (the Crusades).

Soon after 1640, we find him in London, a popular lecturer in the Chapel of St. Mary Savoy. Infused with a spirit of toleration and wisdom, he sought to allay the bitter strife and party feeling of the time, but when war broke out he was faithful to the King's side.

During the Commonwealth, Fuller, being deprived of the right to preach, devoted himself to study and authorship.

In 1658, he was presented to a rectory at Crawford, in Middlesex, and at the Restoration was restored to his old offices. He died in London and was buried at Crawford.

His tomb is not marked with his own witty suggestion for an epitaph—"Here lies Fuller's earth."

Fuller's amazing wit, practical wisdom and sensible and unprejudiced views of life make him one of the most noted men of the age.

Amid a long list of works on religious and historical subjects, his *Church History of Britain* and *The Worthies of England* are best remembered to-day.

The former relates the history of the Church of England to 1648, with many digressions "for variety and diversion . . . to divert the wearied reader."

*The Worthies of England*, left unfinished, was the work of more than twenty years of the author's life. It is a magnificent miscellany of facts about the counties of England and the great men born in them. The stories are told in a quaint, delightful way; they abound in witty illustrations, and are aglow with a pure spirit of patriotism.

His other works include *History of the Holy War*, *The Holy and Profane States*, *A Pisgah View of Palestine*, and many essays, tracts and sermons.

**Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon**, (1608-1674), whose eventful life made its mark on history as well as literature, was born at Dinton, in Wiltshire. He received a university education and entered the Middle Temple to study law. His intelligence and industry led to professional success, but he always loved letters better than law, and delighted in the society of Ben Jonson and his tribe—"never so proud as when he was the worst in the company."

Entering Parliament in 1604, Hyde joined the ranks of the popular party who were seeking reforms in the State. He was not, however, prepared to accept the extreme views of some of the Parliamentary leaders, and soon we find him on the King's side—one of his chief advisers and most faithful supporters. On the overthrow of the Monarchy he fled to Scilly (where he commenced his *History*), later to Jersey, and eventually to the poverty-stricken Court of Prince Charles in France. Sometimes, he tells us, he had "neither clothes nor fire to preserve him from the sharpness of the season, nor three sous in the world to buy a fagot."

At the Restoration, Charles made his faithful friend High Chancellor and gave him the title of Earl of Clarendon. For seven years he was the most powerful man in all England.

He amassed wealth, built himself a palace, and married his daughter to the Duke of York (afterwards James II.). But his good fortune did not last. With the nation he was very unpopular, and not without cause; for, like other men in power in those days, he was guilty of bribery and corruption. The courtiers, also, were jealous of his wealth and power, and the King disliked him because he had often resisted his royal will. In 1667, the once powerful Chancellor was deprived of his offices and impeached for high treason. He again sought an asylum in France, where he spent the last seven years of his life, completing his *History* and writing an autobiography. He died at Rouen.

Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion* is by far the most important account that we possess of the terrible times of the civil war from the pen of a writer who had lived through them. In clear and impressive language the author relates the story of the war as it appeared to a Cavalier, a man strongly prejudiced against the Puritans. His *History* excels in two ways: Clarendon was a great narrator, and describes the battles with so much reality that in imagination we see them before us; and he possessed the difficult art of character-drawing, that is to say, sketching in words the physical, mental and moral characteristics of a given person.

His autobiography (*Life of Edward, Earl of Clarendon*) is really an apology for his own acts and those of Charles I., and is by no means an impartial or truthful narrative.

In style Clarendon is stately and eloquent, and never indulges in very long and involved sentences.

## VII

# THE AGE OF DRYDEN

(1660-1700)

A NEW era in the literature, as well as in the history of our country, dates from the landing at Dover of King Charles II. with the group of Cavalier friends who had been faithful to him in exile.

The Elizabethan school was practically dead. Milton, it is true, remained as a great light in poetry; but the gay followers of King Charles were little likely to learn from him. They despised everything pertaining to the stern days of Puritan rule, or even to the glorious times of Queen Elizabeth, and sought eagerly and successfully to promote a new fashion in Poetry, in the Drama and in Prose.

We have already noted that some reformation in style was needed. Shakespeare, the great artist of the *natural* in poetry, had, with his wonderful genius, portrayed living men and women, and their lives and passions, in true and magnificent verse; but the later poets of his school indulged in most ridiculous flights of fancy, and oftentimes expressed themselves in extravagant and sensational language which was really most unnatural. Thus, a boot was spoken of as "the shining leather that encased the limb"; coffee was the "fragrant juice of Mocha's berry brown." These degenerate poets had lost all the youthful fervour of the Elizabethans, and had not learnt that just and beautiful arrangement of Nature which we call *Art*.

**Characteristics of the Times.**—The age of Charles II. and his brother James was indeed far distant from the heroic and



romantic times of Queen Bess. We have only to read the wonderful diary of an important official in the navy, Samuel Pepys, to realise how great a change had come over the land. The King and his corrupt and dissolute Court cared only for their own personal enjoyment. High offices in the State were often filled by dishonest and incapable men, who thought far more of gaining wealth for themselves than of their country's interests. With acts of heroism or romance, with noble characters or with any highly imaginative work, this Court and society had no sympathy. Pepys' opinion that Shakespeare's *Othello* was "a mean thing," and *The Midsummer Night's Dream* "the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life," no doubt reflects the views of the majority of the playgoers.

There were many men of critical intelligence, but all lacked imagination. Milton's great epic had few admirers, but the feeble poems of Waller, Cowley, Denham, and Davenant were greatly esteemed on account of their classically correct style.

**The New Poetry.**—As already noted, Waller, in 1623, had commenced a new artificial form of poetry, strictly conforming to the rules which governed the Latin and Greek poets; but it was not till after the Restoration that this new order of verse-making had many followers in England. In France, however, a correct school of literature had been flourishing for nearly thirty years.

Malherbe, a learned Frenchman, had, in 1630, set himself the arduous task of purifying the French language and of enforcing the laws of the ancient poets on verse and the drama.

The French Academy, founded in 1636, worked with great energy to carry out Malherbe's teaching, and the learned and polite circles in Paris devoted themselves to discussions on the right uses of words and to making rules to which all branches of literature must submit.

Boileau, the great French satirist, writing about 1660, may be said to have completed the work commenced by Malherbe.

He not only enforced strict classical laws on French literature, but declared that every line of a poem should be of uniform excellence.

It was during these eventful years of French literary history that the Cavaliers had been in exile in France. They had been carried away by the new teaching, and had learnt to admire everything French, and to regard the English poetry of preceding times as barbaric, because it did not conform to the laws enforced in France. They returned to England with these new ideas filling their minds, and, encouraged by the King, succeeded in changing the whole current of literature in their native land. They banished the wild, romantic stories, the love songs and even the metre of the Elizabethans, and introduced a cold, unimaginative, artificial poetry, which took the form of satire, philosophical argument or discourses on political subjects.

**Poets.**—The poet Dryden (first important poem *Annus Mirabilis*, 1667) was the leader in this revolution in style, and is undoubtedly the greatest poet of the age.

It was his influence and guidance which made the new poetry so popular that, for over a century, romantic verse was abandoned, and poets thought only of writing correctly on intellectual subjects. For his metre, he adopted and vastly improved the ten-syllabled rhymed couplet, as reformed by Waller. This heroic metre was brought to still greater perfection in the eighteenth century, by Pope, and was for a long time esteemed the most beautiful form of verse.

**Satires.**—The political satire is the one form of poetry in which this period excels.

We have noticed, in preceding chapters, the crude and rugged verses of the early satirists, but we have not been able to regard the satires they produced as worthy contributions to poetry.

An improvement on these early workers was made at the beginning of Charles II.'s reign, when Andrew Marvell, a Puritan poet, attacked the vices of the King and Court in satiric verse; and Samuel Butler, on the Cavalier side, wrote

with much wit, learning, and drollery against the Puritans in *Hudibras*. But Dryden is the first great English satirist; by the side of his masterly verse all the satires of preceding times sink into insignificance. His *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) is considered the finest purely intellectual poem in our language.

A long series of party satires followed, in which personal attacks were made on leading public men by their opponents; but Dryden's contributions to the list have alone remained famous, and have gained for him the title of "king of English satirists."

A very humorous burlesque, *The Country Mouse and the Town Mouse*, the joint work of Charles Montague (Lord Halifax) and Mat Prior, may be mentioned in connection with this form of poetry. It was an attack on Dryden's two religious argumentative poems, *Religio Laici* and *The Hind and the Panther*.

To **Lyrical Verse** Dryden contributed songs, correct in metre and smooth and pleasing to the ear; and several of King Charles's Court, notably the Earls of Roscommon, Rochester, Mulgrave and Dorset, and Sir Charles Sedley, wrote love songs; but all lack the sweetness and music of Elizabethan and Jacobean lyrics.

The new form of verse called the **Pindaric Ode**, introduced by Cowley, had many followers; but Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* is the only good example of this curious style of versification.

**Drama.**—With the Restoration came a great reaction in favour of amusements; the theatre regained popularity, and tragedies and comedies suited to the tastes of the time were produced.

The new playwrights were greatly influenced by the French dramatists—Corneille and Racine in tragedy, and Molière in comedy. Corneille, the first great French writer of tragedy, modelled his plays in classical form. He employed rhymed verse, and composed his plots in strict conformity to the laws of the drama known as the "unities."

Boileau summed up, in a few words, what is meant by the term "unities," when he wrote :—

“ Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un seul fait accompli  
Tienne jusqu' à la fin le théâtre rempli.”

(That in one place, in one day, one single action accomplished keep the theatre filled to the close of the piece.)

No such law as this had ever guided the great playwrights of preceding times. Shakespeare takes us from one place to another constantly in his plays ; he allows long intervals of time to elapse between the acts, and has many plots within plots. This liberty of action was despised in France ; and English playwrights at the Restoration, inspired with an admiration for everything French, sought to enforce the laws which governed French drama in England. Davenant's opera, *The Siege of Rhodes*, was the first English example of the new school, but Dryden is by far the most important of its exponents.

For many years he was the chief writer for the stage ; and his long list of tragedies and comedies includes our best examples of the classical drama. He did not, however, exclusively adopt French dramatic methods ; for, although for fourteen years he followed the laws of the rhymed couplet, he ultimately abandoned it and returned to blank verse.

Among the writers of tragedy who followed Dryden, the most worthy of notice are Thomas Otway, Thomas Southerne, Nathaniel Lee, and William Congreve (author of only one tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*).

**Prose Comedy.**—A brilliant school of prose comedy, describing the humours and manners of the time, commenced in 1668, with *She Would if She Could*, by Sir George Ethridge. William Wycherley, William Congreve, Sir John Vanbrugh, and George Farquhar are the four chief representatives of this new school.

Congreve, whose work includes *The Old Bachelor*, *Double Dealer* and *Love for Love*, is the most witty of the four ; Wycherley, author of *Love in a Wood*, *The Gentleman Dancing*



*Master, The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer*, is the chief satirist.

They caricatured the society of the day, after the manner of the great French writer of comedy, Molière, and their work excels the English comedy of every other period in wit. But, although we may admire the wit, quick invention and vigour of these Restoration playwrights, their work is so marred by the bad morals of the characters they sought to portray, and by coarse language, that they are now never acted and scarcely ever read.

The Restoration drama shows very clearly the difference which existed between the manners and morals of the play-going public of Queen Elizabeth's time and of the reign of Charles II. respectively.

The crowds who flocked outside the City to the rough theatres erected for their entertainment in Shakespeare's day had, perhaps, poor acting and the crudest of scenery; but the plays they listened to were noble and elevating. Then all that was good and noble in human nature was held up to admiration, all that was vicious displayed so as to excite scorn. From the accession of Charles II. down to the close of the century, a very different order of plays existed. Not one character worthy of respect or admiration is to be found in any drama of the time; instead of the lives of virtuous characters being represented, the intrigues of wicked and vicious people were presented as fit subjects for admiration.

Two new theatres were erected, one in Drury Lane, called the King's house; the other near Lincoln's Inn Fields, under the patronage of the Duke of York.

They were better and more commodious houses than those of earlier times, and the acting and scenery were vastly improved. Women for the first time came upon the stage, ballet dancing was introduced, and large sums of money were expended on stage dresses.

Only a small section of the population, however, ever went to the theatre, and therefore the coarse, immoral plays of the period must be taken to represent the morals and manners

of the Court far more than they reflect the national life. There were many sober and thoughtful people who looked with horror on the corruption which pervaded every branch of public life. A noted divine, Jeremy Collier, made a memorable attack on the profaneness and immorality of the stage, in a treatise published in 1698, and, as society improved in tone, the dramatists wrote purer plays. The influence of Restoration drama, however, may be seen in the form and style of every play written down to the end of the eighteenth century.

**Prose.**—Although the remodelling of poetry claimed so much attention during these years, prose literature was by no means neglected. Works of great importance appeared on many and most diverse subjects, and the new critical school, which effected such changes in poetry, also succeeded in remodelling prose.

The lengthy sentences and florid expressions of the Commonwealth writers were strongly condemned by critical readers, who put correctness of form before everything, and could see nothing beautiful either in poetry or prose which did not conform to rule. They were certainly right in demanding a clearer, simpler and less ornate manner of writing, in which words should be put in their right places with due regard to grammatical construction.

Dryden was the leader in this movement, as in other branches of literature. The *Critical Essays* prefixed to his dramas are of great importance, because they explain very clearly the laws which he sought to enforce upon poetry, and because they are our earliest examples of *modern prose*.

In **Science**, the accession of Charles II. marks a great awakening in England. Sir Francis Bacon's teaching, that all scientific knowledge must come through observation and experiment, was for the first time carefully followed by the little band of scholars who, in 1662, founded the Royal Society for the encouragement of experimental knowledge.

The early members of this now famous scientific institution included the leading poets and prose writers of the day; and

they exerted an influence over literature as well as over science by taking an oath to speak and write clearly, simply and with brevity.

Among the many students of science who patiently laboured during these years, the great Sir Isaac Newton has gained immortal fame. In his *Principia*, published in 1688, he unfolded his theory of gravitation, and thus established the true system of the universe.

**Theologians** preached and wrote with as great fervour and much more skill than in Puritan days. This was an age of great preachers, and the pulpit was still the chief source of instruction. People went to church to hear the sermon, and would sometimes listen for over three hours to a popular divine.

Archbishop Tillotson's influence was very great, both as writer and preacher; and the sermons of Bishop Burnet, Isaac Barrow, Edward Stillingfleet, William Sherlock and a witty controversialist, Robert South, are important contributions to the literature of the day. Political and social subjects often formed part of their discourses, and probably added to their popularity.

A great variety of religious pamphlets were produced. One of the most widely read of these pamphlets was on *The Whole Duty of Man*, the work of an anonymous writer.

**Philosophy.**—Among the great thinkers of the age, John Locke, who contributed most valuable work in his *Essay on the Human Understanding*, holds a chief place.

The great question of authority—the right of a people to resist the government of their ruler—was as eagerly discussed after the Restoration as it had been before, for the misdeeds of Charles II. and James II. were not likely to encourage any further belief in the Divine Right of Kings.

Hobbes, during the Commonwealth, had set forth clearly the powers of the people and the obligations of the sovereign; but Englishmen went much further than that stern philosopher would have allowed when they dethroned James II. and elected a new ruler; and John Locke's searching inquiry on

*Civil Government* (1690) confirmed their action. This work may be considered as the basis of our present Constitutional Government. Locke's *Letters on Toleration* mark another important step in our history towards religious freedom, and his *Thoughts on Education* championed much-needed reforms in education.

In **Miscellaneous Literature** there is a good array of critical writing, essays, biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs.

One English book of criticism gained a European reputation. It was *A Dissertation upon the Epistles of Phalaris* (1699), the work of a great scholar—Richard Bentley. Bentley's work arose out of the curious discussions on the relative importance of ancient and modern writers, which occupied learned men in all countries of Europe towards the close of the seventeenth century. Sir William Temple, a champion of the ancients, had praised certain epistles of Phalaris, which professed to have been written in the sixth century B.C. Bentley proved these letters to be forgeries. His treatise was of vast importance, not only on account of its brilliant treatment of the subject, but because he argued from the entirely new standpoint of historical criticism. His work filled the learned world with astonishment, and may be said to have commenced a new era in scholarship.

Among other critical work Dryden's *Essays and Prologues to Plays* are of chief importance.

Lord Halifax, writing with sparkling humour and in the delightful manner of the French writer, Montaigne, is an important figure among essayists, and, with Sir William Temple, whose works are more renowned for their style than their matter, may be regarded as the immediate predecessor of the great school of essayists whose acquaintance we shall make in Queen Anne's reign.

Bishop Burnet's *History of the Reformation* (1679–81) and his *History of his own Times* (not published till 1723) are interesting memoirs rather than histories, and Samuel Pepys's *Diary* is the most marvellous work of its kind that has ever been published. As a graphic picture of the little inner world



of England in which Pepys moved, it far surpasses the valuable historical *Diary* of his learned friend John Evelyn.

The sketching of characters was still a popular form of writing, and developed into personal attacks on living people.

**Books of Travel** were not nearly as common as they are now, but some few travellers published accounts of their wanderings. Robert Knox's *Record of His Captivity in Ceylon* (1681) is a valuable record; and William Dampier, a noted buccaneer, kept a journal of his wonderful adventures, which was revised by a literary friend and published in 1697.

**Fiction.**—John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is the one great imaginative prose work of the period. In spirit, its author belongs to the Puritan era; in style, he is widely different from the writers of that age. As a model of pure, simple and racy English, this picturesque Bible allegory has had almost as great an influence as the Bible. The unlettered John Bunyan was the first Englishman to write an original fascinating story.

Other works of fiction, of a totally different kind, flourished among society readers and included numerous translations of French romances. Aphra Behn, the first professional woman writer, was the author of several original stories, besides plays and poems.

In reviewing, therefore, the forty years which elapsed between the Restoration and the close of the seventeenth century, we see a large number of literary productions, and note that the whole character of this literature was different from that of preceding times.

Reflection took the place of imagination, criticism of passion, and correctness of style overruled all creative work. We see that this change, though not altogether sudden, was largely influenced by French literature, which at the Restoration became the model of English writers, and was encouraged by the anti-Puritan feeling which pervaded all classes of the people.

Before the close of the century the coarseness and indecency of the drama received a death-blow; the heroic couplet in poetry was brought to great perfection; and prose

and poetry alike were written correctly and with sense and judgment.

This period is "the least creative and the most critical" in English literature. We greatly miss the imaginative work of the Elizabethans, but a reform in style was needed, and therefore we have to thank Dryden and his contemporaries for driving the wild extravagances of the feeble followers of Shakespeare out of poetry, and for creating modern prose.

### POETS

**John Dryden** (1631-1700), the leading poet and the most influential man of the age, both in poetry and prose, was born at the Vicarage of All Saints, Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire.

His father, Erasmus Dryden, was of good family, and possessed a small property, which he bequeathed to his poet son. His mother was the daughter of the Rev. Henry Pickering, Vicar of Aldwinkle. Both parents were strict Puritans, and had dared to oppose the illegal taxation of Charles I.

Of Dryden's early youth little is known. At the age of twelve he appears to have entered Westminster School, and, in 1650, he obtained a Scholarship at Cambridge.

He gained renown at the University as "a man of good parts and learning," but made no reputation as poet.

Milton wrote beautiful verse while still a student; and most of our poets showed signs of genius in youth. Dryden had no creative imagination; he learned to be a poet.

In 1654, he took his degree, and three years later we find him in London striving after literary fame.

English literature at this time was in a state of transition. Dryden allied himself to the new school of artificial critical poetry, and by dint of long and careful study, became its chief exponent.

His eulogy of Cromwell, published the year after the Protector's death, was his first poem worthy of recognition.

At the Restoration he changed with the nation, and paid his court to the new King in verse of a most flattering nature.

In 1663, he married Lady Elizabeth Howard, and in the same year produced his first play, *The Wild Gallant*.

The theatre had by this time regained its old position as a popular form of amusement. There was plenty of occupation for the playwright who could write plays in classical form, suited to the immoral tastes of the time; and Dryden, eager for fame, devoted himself during the next fourteen years of his life almost exclusively to the drama.

The King was among his most enthusiastic patrons, and rewarded him with the poet-laureateship, with the post of historiographer-royal, and with other royal favours.

His plays were not destined to bring him lasting fame, yet he is the most important dramatist of the period.

It was not till he was fifty years of age that the true bent of Dryden's genius was shown in the splendid versification and magnificent satire of *Absalom and Achitophel*. Its publication was followed by a storm of libels on the poet, in prose and verse; but the great satirist was far more than a match for his adversaries, and replied to their attacks in the vigorous and cutting satires of *The Medal* and *Mac Flecknoe*.

Shortly after the accession of James II., Dryden became a Roman Catholic. This conversion brought him into bad repute, for he had only a few years before written an argumentative poem in defence of the Church of England.

At the Revolution, however, he remained true to his new religion, and gave up all his appointments and pensions. Old age was upon him, and poverty seemed imminent; but the poet bravely faced his changed circumstances, and turned again to play-writing and to translating the Latin and Greek poets for his daily bread.

His last years, though not the most prosperous in his life, were brightened by the friendship and respect of the young literary men of the day. In the famous Will's Coffee House, in Russell Street, Covent Garden, "Glorious John"—short and stout in figure, with florid, careworn face, snuffy waist-

coat and long, grey hair—was the centre of an admiring crowd. Seated in his armchair near the fire in winter, or out on the balcony in summer, he would encourage and criticise the work of the young men aspiring for literary fame, who were proud to speak of him as their teacher.

Though failing in body, he worked with youthful energy almost up to the day of his death.

His reply to Jeremy Collier's famous attack on the immorality of the stage, written in 1700, is very characteristic of the work of his later years.

The poet had lost all the rancour and bitterness with which he had formerly assailed his opponents, and accepted the worthy divine's rebuke in meekness, acknowledging the justice of it. "I have pleaded guilty," he says, "to all thoughts and expressions of mine which can be truly argued obscenity, profaneness, or immorality, and retract them."

An attack of gout, resulting in mortification of a toe, caused the poet's death on May Day, 1700. He was honoured with a public funeral, and buried in Westminster Abbey.

Dryden was for long considered one of the greatest poets. Modern criticism has dethroned him from this high estate; but he must always be an important figure in English literature. For nearly a hundred years all our poets and men of letters blindly followed his teaching.

In poetry and in prose alike, his talent and incomparable style are worthy of the highest admiration. His great satires are unique in their superb command of language and the excellent qualities of the rhymed couplet; but the imagination and intense feeling which inspired Chaucer, Shakespeare or Milton are entirely lacking.

Dryden's poetical career commenced with the *Heroic Stanzas on the Death of the Lord Protector*, which was followed by the *Astræa Redux*, written to welcome Charles II., and the *Annus Mirabilis*, on the memorable events of 1666 (the Dutch war and the Great Fire of London).

His long list of plays extends from *The Wild Gallant*



(1663) to *Love Triumphant* (1694). They are chiefly written in the heroic metre and after the manner of the French dramatists. The tragedy of *Don Sebastian* (1690) is considered the poet's dramatic masterpiece.

*All for Love* (1678), the only play, he tells us, written to please himself, is an imitation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, and is composed in blank verse.

But Dryden's most powerful and most perfect work is seen in the satires *Absalom and Achitophel*, *The Medal* and *Mac Flecknoe*.

*Absalom and Achitophel*, the greatest of the three, was published in 1681, at a time when the nation was much divided in opinion over the introduction of the Exclusion Bill in Parliament.

This Bill sought to set aside James Duke of York's claim to the throne on the ground of his being a Roman Catholic, and to make the King's natural son, the Duke of Monmouth, heir in his stead. The Earl of Shaftesbury was the leader of the faction against James. Dryden, in the form of the Old Testament story of David and Absalom, satirised this political scheme. Under the guise of Biblical names, learned men of the day were represented, and their doings set forth in most scornful language. David was supposed to represent Charles II., Achitophel Shaftesbury and Absalom Monmouth.

In *The Medal*, (1682) the poet continued his attack on Shaftesbury; and in *Mac Flecknoe*, (1682) replied to the scandalous libels of a very inferior verse maker, Shadwell, by submitting that would-be poet to the most scathing satire.

*Religio Laici* (1682) and *The Hind and the Panther* (1687) are two argumentative religious poems.

In the former, Dryden argued in favour of the Church of England; in the latter, in order to justify his conversion, he supported Roman Catholicism. The Church of Rome is personated as the Milk-White Hind, the English Church as the Panther and the Dissenters as various wild animals.

Dryden's lyrical poetry includes: *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*, *Ode to the Memory of Anne Killigrew*, *Alexander's Feast* (our

best example of the Pindaric ode), and numerous songs in his plays.

Translations of the Latin poets, Virgil and Juvenal, were published in 1697 and *Fables Ancient and Modern* in 1699. The fables consist of tales from Chaucer and Boccaccio, and rank among the poet's finest examples of versification.

His fame as a prose writer rests on the critical essays *On Heroic Plays*, *On the Historical Poem* and on his *Dialogues on Dramatic Poesy*. These essays are of great importance, because they represent the beginning of modern literary criticism, and rank among the earliest examples of a modern reformed prose.

Dryden is always clear, lucid, and unaffected in style, and he expresses his thoughts in well-balanced language.

From *Absalom and Achitophel* :—

#### CHARACTER OF ELKANAH SETTLE, A SMALL POET OF THE DAY

“Doeg, though without knowing how or why,  
Made still a blundering kind of melody ;  
Spurred boldly on, and dash'd through thick and thin,  
Through sense and nonsense, never out nor in :  
Free from all meaning, whether good or bad,  
And, in one word, heroically mad.  
He was too warm on picking-work to dwell,  
But fagoted his notions as they fell :  
And if they rhymed and rattled, all was well.  
Spiteful he is not, though he wrote a satire ;  
For still there goes some thinking to ill-nature.  
He needs no more than birds or beasts to think :  
All his occasions are to eat and drink.  
If he call rogue and rascal from a garret,  
He means you no more mischief than a parrot :  
The words for friend and foe alike were made ;  
To fetter them in verse is all his trade.”

Specimen of Dryden's prose :—

“It was that memorable day, in the first summer of the late war, when our navy engaged the Dutch ; a day wherein the two most mighty and best appointed fleets which any age had ever

seen, disputed the command of the greater half of the globe, the commerce of nations, and the riches of the universe : while these vast floating bodies, on either side, moved against each other in parallel lines, and our countrymen, under the happy conduct of his royal highness, went breaking, by little and little, into the line of the enemies ; the noise of the cannon from both navies reached our ears about the city, so that all men being alarmed with it, and in a dreadful suspense of the event, which they knew was then deciding, everyone went following the sound as his fancy led him ; and leaving the town almost empty, some took towards the park, some across the river, others down it ; all seeking the noise in the depth of silence."

**Samuel Butler** (1612-1680), the Cavalier satirist, was the son of a small farmer of Worcestershire. Educated at Worcester Grammar School, he probably continued his studies either at Cambridge or Oxford. His first employment was as clerk to a county magistrate. He was afterwards in the household of the Duchess of Kent, and subsequently clerk to a Puritan gentleman, Sir Samuel Luke, who served as a model for the chief character of his satire *Hudibras*.

After the Restoration, Butler was made secretary to the Earl of Carbery, Lord President of Wales, but resigned this appointment on his marriage with a lady of wealth.

In 1663, appeared the first part of his famous satire, written fifteen years earlier. It was an instantaneous success. King Charles thoroughly appreciated its wit, but, unfortunately for the author, rewarded him with nothing more substantial than praise. His wife's fortune was lost, and the remainder of the satirist's life was spent in poverty in London. He died of consumption, in a wretched lodging near Covent Garden, and was buried at the expense of a friend.

Dryden, writing two years later to the Lord High Treasurer and pleading for help for himself, says, "'Tis enough for one age to have neglected Mr. Cowley and starved Mr. Butler."

The *Hudibras*, which appeared in three parts, in 1663, 1664 and 1678, is a witty caricature of the Puritans.

The Presbyterians are personated in Sir Hudibras, a J.P., and the Independents in his Squire Ralpho.

These two sally forth together on a crusade against everything the Puritans thought wrong, and have many ridiculous adventures. The burlesque was written in rhyme, and exhibits curious and copious learning. Some of the most famous epigrams have been quoted from age to age till they have become a part of the language.

### PROSE WRITERS (PHILOSOPHY)

John Locke (1632-1704), a great independent philosopher, whose work had enormous influence in the eighteenth century, was a native of Wrington, Somerset.

Educated at Westminster School and at Oxford, he took his degree, and was appointed Greek lecturer at the University. For some time he studied medicine, but was prevented by ill health from following the medical profession.

In 1666, he was introduced to Lord Ashley, afterwards Earl of Shaftesbury. The politician appears to have at once appreciated Locke's great intellect, and to have sympathised with his love of liberty.

The meeting resulted in a lasting friendship, for, though differing widely in character from Shaftesbury, Locke found much to admire in the astute statesman. For many years he acted as Shaftesbury's private secretary, passing through the political turmoil and the temptations of those corrupt times without swerving from his honest principles.

On the fall of Shaftesbury, in 1675, he crossed to France for the benefit of his health and in order to pursue his philosophical studies.

When Shaftesbury regained his power, in 1679, Locke returned to him, but took no part in the plots in which his patron engaged. After the Earl's final downfall, his secretary withdrew to Holland, where he spent six years of exile in careful study and discourse with learned men and in the preparation of the great works which have made his name famous. His



first important treatise, *Letters on Toleration*, was finished at Rotterdam, and published anonymously in Holland, in 1689.

At the Revolution, he came over to England with Queen Mary, and was offered many high posts in the State.

With characteristic modesty, he accepted only one small appointment, and spent his remaining years in the quiet retirement of country life, generally in Essex, at the seat of a dear friend, Sir Francis Masham.

Here he finished the great *Essay on the Human Understanding*. It was the result of nearly twenty years' laborious work, and gained for its author a European reputation.

The strong views respecting liberty and toleration expressed in his work led him into controversies which lasted almost to the day of his death, in 1704.

Of his moral character we cannot think too highly. Although exposed to the storms and temptations of a most corrupt age, he walked steadfastly in the paths of righteousness and honesty. As public patriot or private friend, he is equally true to the principles of justice and virtue.

The *Essay on the Human Understanding* was the first important treatise on the human mind. Its design, according to the author's own words, was "to inquire into the original certainty and extent of human knowledge, together with the grounds and degrees of belief, opinion, and assent."

Locke's clear and critical inquiry, the result of observation and induction, was of vast importance to the eighteenth-century philosophers. It started a new and true method of inquiry in mental science, just as Sir Francis Bacon had set men on the right road to a knowledge of natural science.

The chief tenet of his teaching, that all knowledge is the result of experience, is borne out in all his works.

The *Thoughts on Education* abound in good and wise counsel to parents and teachers. *Letters on Toleration* support religious freedom on philosophic grounds, and *Tracts on Government* is a great work on constitutional government.

Locke has no pretensions to literary style, but he writes in clear, lucid and homely English.

## FICTION

**John Bunyan** (1628-1688).—There is one work of fiction in the English language which has delighted and interested all classes of people, in childhood and in manhood, from the days of John Bunyan to our own time. That wonderful allegory, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, has been read in every corner of the British possessions, has been translated into eighty-four foreign tongues, and has travelled even to Japan, in its Japanese translation, to please that far-distant race with the apparently real, yet purely imaginary, pilgrimage of the Christian to heaven.

Not one of the learned critics who adorned the latter part of the seventeenth century would have dreamed of prophesying such fame for the unlettered preaching tinker of Bedford.

"An Anabaptist, a very odd, ignorant person," writes Mr. Evelyn of him in his Diary; yet this odd, ignorant man was the one great imaginative writer of the period (if we except Milton) and the author of the only successful long prose allegory that has ever been written.

Born at Elston, near Bedford, John Bunyan probably went as a boy to the Bedford Grammar School, and afterwards learnt his father's trade of brazier, commonly spoken of as tinker.

He enlisted as a soldier at the age of sixteen, but did not remain long in the army. According to his own account he was wild and profane in his youth. He married, in 1648, a wife who brought him for dower two religious books, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*.

The newly married couple were very poor, "not having," says Bunyan, "so much household stuff as a dish or spoon between us both." In their wretched cottage at Elston they read together the two books which formed their library; and there it was that Bunyan passed through the spiritual conflicts, which he afterwards described in his *Grace Abounding*.

About 1653, he entered the church of a little band of dissenting Christians; and, two years later, commenced preaching

in the villages round Bedford. His first book, *Some Gospel Truths Opened*, was published in 1656.

At the Restoration the revival of some old laws against conventicles led to his arrest as an unlicensed preacher, and his imprisonment in Bedford Gaol for twelve years. His treatment during captivity was by no means harsh; he supported himself by making tagged laces and by publishing religious books.

Released, in 1672, after the Declaration of Indulgence, he recommenced his work as preacher; but three years later was again sent to prison for six months. It was during this last imprisonment that he wrote his memorable work, the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

The remainder of Bunyan's life was tranquil and prosperous. He was a popular preacher among the Dissenters in London as well as at Bedford; it was on one of his visits to the metropolis that he was seized with the illness which caused his death.

The *Pilgrim's Progress*, published in 1678, is by far the greatest of Bunyan's books. Although it only professes to be a vision, the characters are as real and living as the personages of the greatest novel.

The adventures of Christian and Hopeful appeal to our hearts; we realise, with them, the toils and dangers of their journey, their joys and sorrows, their experiences in Vanity Fair, the pleasures of the Delectable Mountain and the terrors of the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

The second part of the *Pilgrim's Progress* appeared in 1684, and, although not considered as great as the first part, is full of life and variety. Of Bunyan's other numerous publications the most noted are *Grace Abounding* (1665), *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), and *The Holy War* (1682).

The poor unlettered mechanic gave little thought to style; yet, his simple unpolished English, inspired by his imaginative genius, has far more force and charm in it than much of the studied eloquence of his contemporaries.

## MISCELLANEOUS WRITERS

**Samuel Pepys** (1632-1703), the author of the most delightful Diary that has ever been published, was the son of a well-to-do London tailor. He received his education at St. Paul's School and at Cambridge University, and contracted an early marriage with a beautiful girl of fifteen.

The young couple seem to have been quite without means, but, by the kindness of Sir Edward Montague, afterwards Earl of Sandwich, Pepys obtained, in 1660, the appointment of Clerk of the Acts to the Navy. He knew nothing of the work required of him, but his intelligence and industry soon enabled him to master it and to become one of the most distinguished officials in naval affairs England has ever possessed.

Like the majority of public men in Charles II.'s time, he gained wealth for himself, in ways which we should now consider dishonest, and seems to have been quite unconscious that he was doing anything wrong.

We know every little incident of his life during the years covered by his *Diary*, 1660 to 1669. We see him growing rapidly rich year by year, laying by large sums of money, increasing his household expenses, and buying magnificent clothes for himself and his wife; and, at length, driving in the park in his own coach, and entertaining celebrities in courtly style.

The weakness of his eyes caused him to discontinue his diary in 1669, and solicit leave to travel in France and Holland. His health recovered, he returned to England, and continued to hold high offices up to the time of the Revolution, though, unfortunately for us, he never returned to his journal.

In 1679, he was imprisoned for a few days on the charge of being implicated in the Popish plot; but his shrewdness and sagacity saved him from any other of the innumerable difficulties which beset public men in those times of intrigue.

He was much interested in science, was one of the earliest members of the Royal Society, being ultimately appointed its



president, a post of honour which must have highly delighted him.

He died in 1703, having spent the years of William and Mary's reign in quiet scholarly retirement.

His library he left to Magdalen College, Cambridge. It contained many interesting volumes, for Pepys was a great book-collector, and the immortal *Diary*.

This invaluable record of the extraordinary times of the Restoration was written in shorthand, and lay unnoticed in the college library till the present century. It was first published in 1825.

Pepys was a shrewd and intelligent man, but a great gossip. He wrote down everything he saw and heard about public events, as well as every detail of his own life, with a frankness and *naïveté* no one has ever attempted before or since.

He witnessed the exciting scenes of the Restoration, the Great Plague, the Great Fire and our naval disasters with the Dutch in 1667, and records them faithfully.

He was constantly at Court, and intimate with King Charles, James, Duke of York, and all the leading men of the time. One day we see him going to Tyburn, and paying his shilling to stand on a cart-wheel to see a man hanged ; another day he is gravely discussing important naval matters, and taxing his ingenuity to the utmost to find the money to pay the seamen.

He revels in Court scandals, and is eager to gossip with "Old Moll," the orange woman at the theatre ; and he equally loves picture-books and music, enjoys long talks with Mr. Evelyn on learned subjects, or follows some new scientific experiment at the Royal Society.

Whatever he is doing he is always interesting, and his unique book, written, without any attempt at style, in simple, commonplace English, has become a classic in our literature.

**Gilbert Burnet** (1643-1715), Bishop of Salisbury, and the chief historian of the period, was born at Edinburgh.

He was educated at Aberdeen, and took his degree when only fourteen years of age. He applied himself very studiously to law and divinity, entered the Church, and was appointed

minister of Salton, Haddington, and Professor of Divinity at Glasgow University.

His moderate religious views, however, gained him the enmity of his patron, the powerful Earl Lauderdale, and he was obliged to leave Scotland. Seeking an asylum in London, Burnet became preacher at the Rolls Chapel and at St. Clement Danes.

During Charles II.'s reign, he was an object of suspicion at Court, on account of his Puritan tendencies, and on the accession of James II., he left England to travel on the Continent.

In 1684, he was introduced to William, Prince of Orange, and assisted in the plans then being formed to place William on the English throne.

After his accession, William III. remembered his friend Burnet, and rewarded him with the bishopric of Salisbury. His high moral character, exemplary life, charity, generosity and moderation made him so universally respected that even his adversaries learned to admire his sterling qualities.

He died in London of fever.

Burnet's literary fame rest on three books, his *History of His Own Times*, *History of the Reformation*, and *Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles*.

His style is sometimes harsh and his judgment not always reliable; but his honesty, earnestness and vigour still make his works valuable to a student of history.

The *History of His Own Times* is an entertaining account of affairs in England, as he had seen them or as they had been related to him by others. He was so well acquainted with Charles II., James II., William III. and Mary that he is able to recall them to us far more vividly than any other historian has succeeded in doing.

## VIII.

# THE AGE OF QUEEN ANNE AND THE FIRST GEORGES

(1700-1740)

THE years which followed the death of Dryden are distinguished by a little group of eminent men, who, carrying the teaching of Dryden to its utmost perfection, produced work in poetry and prose justly renowned for its correctness of form, superb wit and satire, fancy and invention. They did not possess much imagination, passion or enthusiasm, but were distinguished for great technical skill, learning and common sense.

The elegant polished verse of Pope and the brilliant prose of Swift, Addison, Steele, Berkeley and Defoe were famous abroad as well as at home. French writers no longer regarded English literature as barbaric; they studied, admired and borrowed from it for their own work.

Thus, our Augustan Age, as it has been sometimes called, in imitation of the greatest period in Latin literature, is a very important and interesting era in our history.

**The Times of Queen Anne.**—Before considering the productions of these years, let us glance for a moment at the times of “good Queen Anne of glorious memory”; for in no other period is the work of authors more characteristic of the times they lived in.

This age was not an age of noble deeds or patriotic enthusiasm. The struggle for freedom and the religious fervour which had inspired seventeenth-century writers, no

longer existed, and, although the dissolute lives which society had openly boasted of under Charles II. had given way to professions of morality, the conduct of even our greatest public men was corrupt and unscrupulous.

It was an age of unbelief in religion and of disgraceful intrigues in politics.

In Queen Anne's reign the leaders of the two great parties in the State, Whig and Tory, were ready to give large sums of money to enlist, on their respective sides, the best poets and prose writers. Politics were preached in the pulpit, politics governed the coffee-house clubs and guided every action in life. "Even the dogs and cats," says Swift, "were prompted by Tory or Whig feelings"; and, in Addison's delightful sketch of Sir Roger de Coverley's journey from London into the country, we are told that that staunch old Tory would on no account stay at an inn if the landlord happened to be a Whig. London was naturally the heart of this political life, and, as it was through politics that men sought fame, all the literature of the period centres round the busy life of the great city.

It is one of the leading characteristics of these times that all the writers were known to each other—personal friends or personal foes—and that we have no isolated genius working, like Milton or Bunyan, outside the world of letters.

To London came students and writers from all parts of the country, eager to gain the patronage of a political party by libelling its enemies, and ready to accept the golden guineas of some great noblemen in return for flattering dedications of their works.

The life of a literary man presented two great extremes. If he succeeded in making a hit with some political satire or lampoon, he became rich and was rewarded with high offices in the State; if he failed to produce anything popular, his life was spent in wretchedness and poverty in some miserable garret in a poor quarter of the town (commonly known as Grub Street) compiling indexes or almanacs, or doing other hack work.



Pope, from his snug villa at Twickenham, cruelly satirised these poor members of his profession in his *Dunciad*.

Towards the middle of the century the position of literary men became even more precarious. The ministers of Queen Anne had patronised literature and given prizes of great wealth to a few ; but Walpole, the ruling minister in George I. and George II.'s reigns, gave no encouragement to learning or the arts. Under his government the bulk of literary men lived the miserable existence so vividly pictured by Macaulay in his essay on Dr. Johnson.

"All that is squalid and miserable might now be summed up in the word Poet. That word denoted a creature dressed like a scarecrow, familiar with compters and spunging-houses, and perfectly qualified to decide on the comparative merits of the Common Side in the King's Bench prison, and of Mount Scoundrel in the Fleet. Even the poorest pitied him. And they well might pity him. For if their condition was equally abject, their aspirings were not equally high, nor their sense of insult equally acute. To lodge in a garret up four pair of stairs ; to dine in a cellar among footmen out of place ; to translate ten hours a day for the wages of a ditcher ; to be hunted by bailiffs from one haunt of beggary and pestilence to another, from Grub Street to St. George's Fields, and from St. George's Fields to the alleys behind St. Martin's Church ; to sleep on a bulk in June and amidst the ashes of a glass-house in December ; to die in an hospital and to be buried in a parish vault, was the fate of more than one writer, who, if he had lived thirty years earlier, would have been admitted to the sittings of the Kitcat or the Scriblerus Club, would have sat in Parliament, and would have been intrusted with embassies to the High Allies ; who, if he had lived in our time, would have found encouragement scarcely less munificent in Albemarle Street or in Paternoster Row."

Men who lived thus were not likely to be troubled with scruples as to the nature of their work. They flattered, in the most abject manner, or abused, according to the commands of their employers. The age was one of unbridled slander, and even the most eminent writers of the time made literature a political tool.

The social was little better than the political life ; the great painter Hogarth has immortalised the doings of society in many of his pictures ; and the gambling, drunkenness and duelling which prevailed have been as vividly described by Addison and Steele.

Highwaymen infested the main thoroughfares of the metropolis, and included among their numbers young men of rank. The servants of Addison's *Sir Roger de Coverley*, when they went to the play, "provided themselves with good oaken plants" to protect their master from the brutal attacks of some dissolute men called "Mohocks"; and Swift, in writing to his friend Stella, tells her of "a race of rakes that play the devil about the town every night, and split people's noses."

The conduct of the fair sex was equally characteristic of the times. They gambled, drank gin and slandered their friends in unmistakably strong language. Of the Duchess of Marlborough it is related that she once called on her lawyer without leaving her name. The clerk, in relating the incident afterwards to his master, said, "I could not make out who she was, but she swore so dreadfully she must be a lady of quality."

Such was English life in the eighteenth century. It was a time of general prosperity for the nation, but, withal, an age of political corruption, of coarse vices, of cruel sports and cruel punishments. No great imaginative genius appeared, but we may recall a long list of brilliant writers and, as the century wore on, of great philosophers and men of science.

**Poetry.**—The perfectly expressed but artificial poetry produced during the years covered by the present chapter consists chiefly of three kinds of verse—the *satire*, the *narrative poem* and the *occasional poem*. The only lyrics worthy of remembrance are the stirring songs of the Scotch poet, Allan Ramsay. There is very little love poetry or descriptive verse, no great epic, elegy, or ode, nor any great poetical drama.

The representative poet of the age is Alexander Pope, the

most perfect and, at the same time, the most artificial exponent of the school of Dryden. He had no true love for nature, no creative power, nor any ear for the most sublime melodies of verse; but he brought the heroic couplet to its highest perfection, and, within the narrow limits in which his work was confined, was a great poet. His *Essay on Man*, *Essay on Criticism*, *Moral Essays*, *The Dunciad*, and *The Rape of the Lock* are memorable poems. Many of his witty epigrams have become a part of our language; indeed, after Shakespeare, no poet has been so often quoted as Pope.

Matthew Prior, who had gained renown in Dryden's day as the part author of *The Country Mouse and the Town Mouse*, continued to write narrative verse. John Gay, the brilliant satellite of Pope and pet poet of society, contributed lively and graceful poetry in *The Shepherd's Calendar* and *The Fables*.

Addison wrote devotional verse, and celebrated the Battle of Blenheim in *The Campaign*; and Swift contributed coarse poems, mostly on political subjects.

A crowd of minor poets worshipped at the feet of Pope; but they lacked their master's perfection of expression, and were devoid of the true inspiration of the poet, and therefore their rhymes are of little interest. Few people now care to read Samuel Garth's *Dispensary*, John Philip's *Splendid Shilling*, Ambrose Philip's *Pastorals*, Matthew Green's *Spleen*, Thomas Tickell's *Translation of the Iliad*, or even the smooth, harmonious verse of Thomas Parnell, or the *Grongar Hill* of John Dyer.

But all the poets were not content to follow blindly the artificial school of Pope. Thomson's *Seasons* and *The Castle of Indolence*, Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, Robert Blair's *Grave*, and the songs and lovely pastoral poem, *The Gentle Shepherd*, of Allan Ramsay, show new influences working in poetry; for these writers are inspired by a vivid imagination and by a feeling for nature which Pope and his followers did not possess. *The Seasons* was for long a very popular poem. It has been said of its author that he was the first among the poets to bring men back to "Nature, the Vicar of Almighty God."



For the **Drama** the theatres depended, for the most part, on the playwrights of the preceding era. Farquhar and Vanbrugh, whose work we have already considered, wrote comedies in Anne's reign; and, amongst the works of new men, Addison's tragedy *Cato* was popular on account of its supposed political allusions, and Steele's plays were free from grossness, though neither brilliant nor interesting. Gay's *Beggar's Opera* took the town by storm, and was so popular with the ladies that they carried about the songs written on their fans; and Colley Cibber wrote bright satirical prose comedies in Queen Anne's and George I.'s reigns.

The **Prose** of the age has made a more lasting impression on our literature than the poetry. The names of Swift, Addison, Steele, and Defoe are known to us all; their works may be found on every bookshelf to-day.

The commencement of the **Periodical Essay** is undoubtedly the most interesting creation of the time. This delightful form of literature was partly the development of the newspaper and partly the outcome of a kind of writing practised in France by Montaigne in his *Essais* (1580-8), and, at a later date, by La Bruyère in *Les Caractères* (1688).

**Growth of the Newspaper.**—To trace its commencement in the newspaper, we must turn over the pages of the few journals which had gradually crept into existence since the publication of the first *News of the Week*, in 1622. The *Scotch Kites*, *Parliament Kites*, the *Secret Owls* and all the other vigorous and malicious political pamphlets which had flourished during the Commonwealth were forbidden productions after the Restoration. A stern censorship was enforced throughout the reigns of Charles II. and his brother, and therefore journalism made but little progress. A few society papers, such as *News from the Land of Chivalry* and *The Knight of the Squeaking Fiddlestick*, expressed the tastes of the time; and the *Public Intelligencer* (1663) and the *London Gazette* (1665) gave Londoners such scraps of political news as the Secretary of State thought it desirable that they should know. Dwellers in the country depended on the weekly



Newsletter for their knowledge of passing events. Most country districts had their correspondent in London, who went round to all the coffee-houses and gathered together the current gossip of the time, which he sent down to the country, in the form of a letter, by the weekly post.

After the Revolution much greater freedom was enjoyed by the Press, and numerous papers came into circulation. *The Daily Courant* (1702) was the first daily. This parent of our great modern newspapers consisted of one small sheet printed on one side only. The news it contained, like that of all its contemporaries, was very meagre. As time went on, however, papers were enlarged, and small items of literary news, such as notices of new books, were added.

To Daniel Defoe is due the honour of starting the first periodical which really travels into the realms of literature. His *Review*, published in 1704, was primarily a political journal, but included within its pages articles on a great variety of subjects.

Defoe's chief aim was to give truthful accounts of passing events; to these accounts he often added independent comments of his own, somewhat after the manner of the writers of leading articles in our papers of to-day. He also published slight sketches dealing with the fancies and follies of society.

The germ of the essay may be seen in this work of Defoe's; but it was Richard Steele who produced the first modern essay, worthy the name, in our first literary magazine, *The Tatler*, which he started in 1709.

His original plan was to give, in the person of a snuffy astrologer and quack-doctor, whom he called Izaak Bickerstaff, "advices and reflections" to mankind three times a week. He intended to treat, he says, in his first number of poetry, criticism, accounts of gallantry, pleasure and entertainment, foreign and domestic news, and of subjects "which may be of entertainment to the fair sex."

After the publication of the first eighty numbers, Steele was joined by his learned friend, Joseph Addison, whose

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superb style, together with a knowledge of the French essayists, made him a very valuable colleague.

Thus this now popular form of literature, the *English Prose Essay*, was created.

We have heard before of the essay, in connection with the work of Sir Francis Bacon, and in the later productions of Temple; but neither the profound argumentative writing of Bacon nor the lighter eloquence of Temple were essays in the modern sense of the term.

*The Tatler*, published at first three times a week, afterwards daily, was succeeded by *The Spectator*, in 1711, in which Addison played a foremost part. He was "Mr. Spectator," the chief writer among the members of the imaginary club, the doings of which are the subjects of many of the most delightful papers. *The Spectator* was a daily issue, and had for those days an enormous sale; gentlemen in the coffee-houses welcomed its appearance every morning, and ladies in their boudoirs discussed Mr. Spectator's humorous papers as they performed their toilettes. In the full tide of its success and popularity the publication ceased at the end of 1712.

*The Guardian*, *The Freeholder* and Swift's *Tory Examiner*, which are the other chief papers of the period, are less interesting, and are almost exclusively devoted to politics.

*The Tatler* and *The Spectator* contained essays on a great variety of subjects, embracing all the social and political life of Queen Anne's reign.

With the most piquant wit and humour the follies of society ladies and gentlemen are laid bare, political and literary subjects discussed, and plays, new books and London life in general described. Addison's work is more perfect than his friend's; his famous sketches of Sir Roger de Coverley rank among the most charming and humorous studies of character in our language.

We have to-day a host of writers contributing delightful essays to our innumerable magazines; but not one among them excels in brightness, grace or wit our first periodical essayists.

From the polished and polite figure of Addison we turn to a vastly different character in the rugged and uncompromising Dean Swift.

This hater of shams, this ardent politician, this keen satirist is the one original genius in the little group of talented wits who grace these years. He has left his mark on literature in the two masterpieces of humour and satire, *The Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of Books*, and in a host of political pamphlets and one great work of satire and fiction, *Gulliver's Travels*.

John Arbuthnot ranks after Swift as a great and witty writer. His *History of John Bull*, *The Art of Political Lying*, and the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* have gained for him lasting fame as a satirist.

In **Fiction**, besides *Gulliver's Travels*, we have Defoe's famous story of *Robinson Crusoe*. This wonderful tale of adventure commences a new era in fiction. As a romance of real life it far excels any story of preceding times, and it may be said to have started, not only in England, but on the Continent, a new order of fiction which developed into the modern novel.

This was an age of great **Letter Writers**. In days when travelling was long, tedious and dangerous, and postage very expensive, people did not write to their friends unless they had something important to tell them and could devote a long time to preparing their epistles. The arrival of a letter was an important event in a household, and letters were treasured as heirlooms. In this way a great deal of the correspondence of these times has come down to us, and sheds a keen light on passing events. Among many well-known people, whose correspondence has been preserved, Lady Mary Montagu, renowned alike for her wit, beauty and learning, has left a valuable legacy of letters. They are delightful in style, and abound in witty sallies and interesting anecdotes.

Lord Chesterfield, of some reputation as an essayist, lives to-day in his letters to his son. They reveal a very low view of life, and an extremely poor estimate of women. Swift's



*Journals* to his dear woman friend, Stella, are of intense and pathetic interest, and a great contrast to the worldly wisdom of Lord Chesterfield. Pope, with characteristic vanity, edited his own letters, and caused them to be published.

**Philosophy.**—Although the eighteenth century, as a whole, is renowned for its philosophers, few great thinkers appeared during the first forty years.

Bishop Berkeley stands first, with his important contributions to metaphysics, *Hylas and Philonous* and *Siris*.

Lord Shaftesbury, in his *Characteristics*, and Lord Bolingbroke in his *Philosophical Essays*, expressed the opinions of a section of writers who were called Deists, because they denied the truths of revealed religion; and Bernard de Mandeville wrote a curious social satire in *The Fable of the Bees*.

In **Theology** there is little that will compare favourably with the great writers of the seventeenth century. Samuel Clarke and Bishops Butler, Bentley, and Warburton opposed the philosophy of the Deists in sober volumes. Butler's *Analogy of Revealed Religion*, the most important treatise on the subject, has become a standard book in theology. William Law's *Serious Call to the Unconverted* is the only work in religious literature inspired by religious enthusiasm.

Taken as a whole, the productions of the years which we have now sketched are in many ways unique. Criticism had brought perfection of form; and such writers as Pope, Berkeley, Addison and Swift express themselves in brilliant polished English. Their work is, however, purely the work of the intellect; for, in their horror of exaggerated feeling and fear of being deemed enthusiastic, they fled from purely imaginative work.

Common sense governs everywhere. We are fascinated by the charm, brilliancy and wit of many masterpieces of English writing; but, with the exception of certain poets, such as Thomson and Ramsay, who in spirit do not belong to the age of Pope, not one poet or prose writer appeals to our sympathies by his feeling for the beauties of nature or by his description of the joys or sorrows of mankind.



Swift drew public attention to the misgovernment of Ireland by satire and ridicule, not by appealing to men's hearts; Pope describes Windsor Forest as he might the scenery at the pantomime, and his love-making is as unreal as the clown's broken heart at the fickleness of Columbine.

## POETS

**Alexander Pope** (1688-1744) is the representative poet of the age, and the chief of all the poets of the artificial school in England. The story of his life is in many ways a sad one. He was a cripple from earliest childhood, his life, as he expressed it himself, was "a long disease." Yet, in spite of this terrible drawback, his indomitable will, courage and perseverance carried him to the goal of his youthful ambitions; he became the most skilful poet in the land. Pope's father was a London linen-draper, and a Roman Catholic at a time when the members of that Church were in great disfavour in England.

Having amassed a fortune, the elder Pope retired from business soon after his son's birth, and settled at Binfield, on the outskirts of Windsor Forest. Here thirty-seven years of the poet's life were spent.

His education was almost entirely the result of his own diligence, for he was too delicate to go to a public school, and the Catholic priests, who were engaged to instruct him, taught him little beyond the rudiments of Latin and Greek. Day and night the little cripple pored over his books, studying Spenser, Waller and Dryden, the last of whom he had once seen at Will's Coffee House.

Dryden was the special poet of his admiration; in later life he declared he had learned the art of verse-making entirely from the works of the great satirist. When only twelve years old, Pope wrote his first poem, an *Ode on Solitude*, and before he was eighteen his *Pastorals* had gained him recognition as a poet.

They were praised by the leading critics of the day, and were the means of making the young author acquainted with

the old dramatist Wycherley, who gave him his introduction to London life. The young poet's extraordinary talents were quickly recognised by Addison, Steele, Swift, Arbuthnot and other famous wits, and the publication of his next poem, *The Essay on Criticism*, confirmed the good opinion of his friends. It was a wonderful production for a young man of twenty-one, and Swift was so enthusiastic over it that he went about talking of "Mr. Pope the Papist" as "the best poet in England," and trying to get people to subscribe for the long work the young poet was then contemplating, viz. the translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

At the age of twenty-four, Pope commenced this poem, which was to fill six volumes and be sold at the price of six guineas. The *Iliad* was completed in 1720, and brought Pope a fortune. He is said to have made a profit of £9,000, a huge sum in those days for an author to make by his books. A greater poet, Milton, had been content, sixty years earlier, to sell his immortal epic for a modest £5. With some of his wealth Pope bought the villa at Twickenham, which he occupied till his death. The publication of the *Iliad* made him a literary lion; he was much sought after by fashionable society, and was an honoured figure in the coffee-houses of the wits. With his mother, whom he tenderly loved, to keep house for him, he ought to have been a happy man. Unfortunately, however, he had many defects of character as well as physical infirmities. He quarrelled with Addison and many of his friends, and he treated Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, to whom he had at one time made love, so vindictively that she used to call him "the wicked wasp of Twickenham."

In his prosperity, the poet worked as diligently and unceasingly as he had done before fame smiled upon him. *The Dunciad*, the *Essay on Man*, the *Moral Essays* and *Translations of Horace*, produced during the later years of his life, may be said to be the crowning efforts of his genius.

He died from asthma and dropsy at the age of fifty-six, and was buried in Twickenham Church.

Of Pope's character few have ever had a good word to say; but some allowance should be made for his feeble condition. Dr. Johnson tells us that one side of his body was contracted; "his legs were so slender that he enlarged their bulk with three pairs of stockings, which were drawn on and off by the maid; for he was not able to undress himself, and neither went to bed nor rose without help." His vanity was intense; for State occasions he would have himself decked out in black velvet, a tie wig, and a little sword. 'Tis a very pitiable picture!

In his friendships the poet was certainly unamiable, vindictive and treacherous. His whole life is a series of trickeries, petty intrigues and deceptions.

He was, however, a great artist, following literature for its own sake in an age when most men worked for places and wealth. His love and care for his mother, and the lasting friendship of Swift, Gay and Arbuthnot prove that he had some good in his nature.

If we place perfection of form before beautiful ideas, Pope is a great poet. He laboured strenuously to produce finished verse, and succeeded in bringing the heroic couplet into absolutely smooth, correct and melodious form.

He never sought after great and noble subjects, neither had he any depth of feeling nor eye for nature; but he depicts the manners, prejudices and sentiments of his own day with consummate skill; and, as a brilliant satirist, is second only to Dryden.

His chief poems are: *Pastorals* (1709), *Essay on Criticism* (1711), *Rape of the Lock* (1712); *The Messiah*, *Windsor Forest* (1713), *Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady*, *Epistle of Eloisa to Abelard*, Translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (1715-25), *The Dunciad* (1728), *Essay on Man* (1732-34), Imitation of the satires of the Latin poet Horace (1734), *Moral Essays* 1733-37.

*The Rape of the Lock* is a delightful poetical burlesque. It was founded upon an incident that had caused a quarrel between two great families.

Lord Petre, in a moment of youthful frolic, had cut off a lock of hair from the head of a young lady, Miss Arabella Fennor. This was keenly resented by the friends of the young lady, and Pope was asked by Lord Petre to write a poem, which, by showing the humorous side of the quarrel, might lead to a reconciliation. He treated the subject in a most artistic fashion, introducing a fairy element in nymphs and sylphs who seek in vain to save the lock of hair.

Pope excels in this poem, because he was writing about his own times and the people he knew.

The translation of the *Iliad* is a magnificent example of versification, but is to-day regarded very much in the spirit of the great scholar Bentley, who wrote of it, "It is a pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer."

In *The Dunciad*, the fiercest and finest of his satires, Pope attacked all the authors and petty scribblers who had ever offended him. He celebrates the accession of a King to the vacant throne of Dulness, and describes the sports of authors, booksellers and critics, before the newly-elected monarch. Among the "Dunces" who are thus held up to ridicule appear the learned Bentley and such a writer of genius as Defoe. It was a mean subject, and, although a masterpiece of satire, we cannot help feeling contempt for the prosperous poet sitting in his elegant villa at Twickenham, inditing such cruel attacks on the struggling members of his profession, and ridiculing them for their poverty.

The *Essay on Man* is an argumentative poem, founded on the weak philosophy of the Earl of Shaftesbury.

As an example of poetic skill and keen wit it is perfect. It is crowded with epigrams which have become familiar quotations. We can scarcely open a page without coming upon a line now in daily use.

#### FROM THE "RAPE OF THE LOCK"

"But when to mischief mortals bend their will,  
How soon they find fit instruments of ill!  
Just then, Clarissa drew, with tempting grace,  
A two-edged weapon from her shining case ;



So ladies, in romance, assist their knight,  
 Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.  
 He takes the gift with reverence, and extends  
 The little engine on his fingers' ends ;  
 This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,  
 As o'er the fragrant steams she bent her head.  
 Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair,  
 A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair !  
 And thrice they twitched the diamond in her ear ;  
 Thrice she looked back, and thrice the foe drew near.  
 Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought  
 The close recesses of the virgin's thought :  
 As on the nosegay in her breast reclined,  
 He watched the ideas rising in her mind,  
 Sudden he viewed, in spite of all her art,  
 An earthly lover lurking at her heart.  
 Amazed, confused, he found his power expired,  
 Resigned to fate, and with a sigh retired.

The peer now spreads the glittering forfex wide  
 To enclose the lock ; now joins it, to divide.  
 E'en then, before the fatal engine closed,  
 A wretched Sylph too fondly interposed ;  
 Fate urged the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain  
 (But airy substance soon unites again),  
 The meeting points the sacred hair dis sever  
 From the fair head, for ever, and for ever !”

**James Thomson** (1700–1748) falls in point of time within this period in literature ; but his verse has little in common with the productions of the school of Pope.

English poetry owes much to Thomson, for he was the first poet in the eighteenth century to wander outside the limitations of the artificial school of poetry, and to display a true feeling for nature in his description of country and country life.

He was of Scotch parentage, the son of a Presbyterian minister, and was born at Ednam, on the banks of the Tweed. He began to rhyme in early boyhood, but, unlike most youthful aspiring poets, was wise enough to make an annual bonfire of all his early efforts in verse making.

He was educated at Jedburgh and at Edinburgh University,

where, at his father's request, he studied for the Church. His love for poetry, however, greatly interfered with his theological work, and a letter of encouragement from a friend in London decided him to give up the Church and go and seek fame and fortune in the big city.

He arrived in London with his pockets full of manuscripts and letters of introduction, but with scarcely any money. His letters were stolen, his little stock of coin spent, and his prospects of fortune looked very black indeed when Lord Binning took compassion on the young Scotchman and appointed him tutor to his son.

By 1726, Thomson had found a publisher for *Winter*, the first part of his poem *The Seasons*, and had, after the fashion of the day, dedicated it to a patron, who rewarded him with twenty guineas.

*Winter*, though only valued by the publisher at three guineas, was immediately successful, and was followed by *Summer*, *Spring* and *Autumn*, all four poems being published together, in 1730. In 1729, Thomson sought fame as a dramatist. His tragedy *Sophonisba* was acted at Drury Lane, to a crowded and aristocratic audience. But it was not a success, for, although the author could write beautiful verse, he could not invent good plots.

One line of the play—"O Sophonisba! Sophonisba O!"—was turned by a mocking critic into—"O Jemmy Thomson! Jemmy Thomson O!" and, being repeated up and down the streets of London, made the play an object of mirth.

In spite of the failure of *Sophonisba* and other dramatic productions, Thomson's fame as a poet was firmly established.

In 1731, he left England as tutor to the son of the Solicitor-General, on a two years' tour through France, Switzerland and Italy. The remaining years of his life were spent at his house at Richmond. He held several State appointments, which gave him an income without the necessity of working, and thus he was enabled to pass his days in ease and luxury.

His last and finest work, *The Castle of Indolence*, was produced during these years. It was published, in 1748, a

short time before his death. Thomson's character was kindly, gay, easy-going and indolent. His good nature and rare modesty made him universally loved; one friend speaks of him as "more fat than bard beseems," but "void of envy quite and lust of gain."

"The world forsaking with a calm disdain,  
Here laughed he careless in his easy seat,  
Here quaff'd encircled with the joyous train,  
Oft moralising sage : his ditty sweet,  
He loath'd much to write, nor car'd to repeat."

Thomson chose subjects which appealed to everybody—to old and young, to learned and unlearned.

In *The Seasons* he described, with much feeling, truth and accuracy, and in melodious blank verse, country scenery and country life as he had known them in his Scotch home.

*The Castle of Indolence* is an allegory of an enchanted castle. The inhabitants live in a state of drowsy luxury, and the hours glide sleepily on till the good knight Industry comes and breaks the spell.

The poet's other works include two long poems, *Liberty* and *Britannia*, and *The Masque of Alfred*, remembered now only on account of its containing the famous song *Rule Britannia*,

STANZA FROM "THE CASTLE OF INDOLENCE"

"In lowly dale, fast by a river's side,  
With woody hill o'er hill encompassed round,  
A most enchanting wizzard did abide,  
Than whom a fiend more fell is nowhere found.  
It was, I ween, a lovely spot of ground :  
And there a season atween June and May,  
Half pranked with spring, with summer half imbrowned,  
A listless climate made, where, sooth to say,  
No living wight could work, ne car'd even for play."

A SUMMER DAWN, FROM "THE SEASONS"

"And soon, observant of approaching day,  
The meek-ey'd Morn appears, mother of dews,  
At first faint-gleaming in the dappled east ;

Till far o'er ether spreads the widening glow,  
 And, from before the lustre of her face,  
 White break the clouds away.—With quicken'd step  
 Brown Night retires. Young Day pours in apace,  
 And opens all the lawn's prospect wide.  
 The dripping rocks, the mountain's misty top,  
 Swell on the sight, and brighten with the dawn.  
 Blue, through the dusk, the smoky currents shine :  
 And from the bladed field the fearful hare  
 Limp, awkward ; while along the forest-glade  
 The wild deer trip, and often turning gaze  
 At early passenger."

### PROSE WRITERS

**Jonathan Swift (1667-1745).**—The life of our most powerful prose satirist is a great tragedy. He was, in many respects, one of the greatest figures of the age, yet, as we follow him through his tumultuous career, to die at last "like a poisoned rat in a hole," we must pronounce his life to have been a failure. Swift was born in Dublin of English parentage. Owing to the death of his father and the poverty of his mother, he was brought up by his uncle Godwin. This uncle sent him to Kilkenny School and to Dublin University, where he studied in a very desultory manner, and barely escaped being plucked in the examinations for his degree. His proud, undisciplined nature seems to have smarted under the patronage of his uncle, of whom, in after life, he was never known to speak with gratitude.

On the death of this relative, in 1688, Swift crossed to England, and found employment as secretary to Sir William Temple, the statesman and writer. But life with his new patron, at Moor Park, in Surrey, was unbearable to the arrogant young man. He returned to Dublin in 1694, entered the Church, and accepted a small country living near Belfast. Two years later he had given up his country parsonage, and was back again working as Sir William's secretary.

From this second sojourn at Moor Park dates the one beautiful episode in Swift's life ; his attachment to the charm-



ing and intelligent girl, Hester Johnson, who was one of the brightest members of the household.

She came to Swift for help in her studies, and proved a very apt pupil, ever ready to sit at the feet of the rough-tempered divine. A deep and lasting affection arose between them. According to some authorities they were secretly married; but whether this was so or not, it is certain that Swift confided in his sweet woman friend all the joys and sorrows of his life.

When they were parted, he wrote long letters to her, which she very carefully preserved. They have been published since as the *Journal to Stella*, and are a very important key to the satirist's character. To the world he appeared to be a heartlessly cruel and very selfish man; to Stella he revealed a warm heart and a lovable nature.

The years spent in Sir William Temple's house were a time of great usefulness to Swift. He devoted a great deal of his time to study, made the acquaintance of many noted men, and produced his famous satires, *The Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. After his patron's death, he sought for an appointment at Court, and obtained the post of secretary to Lord Berkeley, one of the Lord Deputies of Ireland. In Dublin society Swift was very popular, and numerous anecdotes are told of his witty sayings and practical jokes.

One of his most amusing essays, *Meditation on a Broomstick*, had its origin in a trick played on the wife of Lord Berkeley.

This worthy lady had a great admiration for the ponderous works of a divine named Boyle, and required the secretary to read one of his sermons to her every day. Swift by no means enjoyed this task, so one day, to lighten his labour, he composed a sermon on a broomstick, written in the style of Boyle, to which the lady listened with much pleasure, only remarking on the strangeness of the subject.

In 1700, the living of Laracor near Turin, and a prebend in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, were presented to Swift. During the next ten years he was often in London on political business for the Archbishop of Dublin. In the great city,

where he was already known as an author, he enjoyed the friendship of Addison, Pope, Prior and other wits, and was a welcome guest at the coffee-houses frequented by literary men.

He worked strenuously with the Whigs to obtain Church reforms, wrote numerous pamphlets on ecclesiastical subjects, and some humorous squibs on an almanac-maker named Partridge.

Failing to obtain the desires of his heart from the Whigs, Swift, in 1710, joined the Tory ranks and commenced the editorship of a new Tory paper, *The Examiner*. In his hands this political paper became a most powerful weapon against the Whigs.

He obtained, however, little recompense from the Tories, for his proud nature refused the payment which they would have given him. He preferred rather to tyrannise over society drawing-rooms, and to live in hope of the bishopric, which was never granted him.

The deanery of St. Patrick's was his only reward, and thither, on the accession of George I. and the consequent fall of the Tories from power, he retired to a life of exile very uncongenial to him.

One episode of his London life followed him to Dublin. He had foolishly flattered and written verses to a young lady, Esther Vanhonrigh, who conceived a romantic attachment for him, and went to Ireland, thinking he would marry her. The Dean was, however, already pledged to Stella; and the unhappy lady, crushed by the disappointment, died in Dublin in 1723. Swift wrote verses in her honour in *Cadenus to Vanessa*. In Dublin, as in London, the Dean was ever busy with his pen. The famous book *Gulliver's Travels* was the work of these years. He also wrote fiercely of the wrongs of Ireland, which in those days were very real. This he did from no love of Ireland, but because he hated all injustice and oppression. His *Drapier Letters* and his numerous other Irish pamphlets made him the idol of the Irish nation.

The death of Stella, who had long resided in Dublin, in 1728, was a terrible blow to the at all times unhappy man. His English friends, Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot and Bolingbroke, tried in vain to cheer him with their letters. As the years went on, he became more and more gloomy and savage in his temper, till, in 1740, the madness he had long feared came upon him.

The story of the last five years of his life is one of hopeless misery. He died in 1745, leaving nearly all his money to build a hospital for lunatics and imbeciles in Dublin.

Although Swift was the author of some strong but generally coarse verse, his fame rests entirely on his powerful prose. His irony, genius for satire, humour, skill in argument, and, above all, his magnificent command of English, place him among our greatest writers.

He lacks, however, all sympathy and love for humanity. He hated men, and could, better than anyone, exhibit their vices with scorn and contempt. Nobleness of character and purity of life he could not believe in, for he regarded the whole world as a mass of cant and hypocrisy.

The most important of his works are: *The Tale of a Tub* (1704), *The Battle of Books* (1704), *Journal to Stella*, *The Drapier Letters* (1724), *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

*Gulliver's Travels*, the most popular of his books, is one of the most original and most witty stories ever written, besides being a great political and social satire.

The wonderful land of the Lilliputians, with its tiny people only six inches high; Brobdignag, with its mighty giants; and Laputa, with its philosophers, have delighted many readers from Swift's day to our own.

*The Tale of a Tub* is a prose allegory, written in support of the Church of England.

*The Battle of the Books* is a clever satire on the controversy going on between learned men of the time concerning the respective merits of ancient and modern authors.

The *Journal to Stella* is, in its way, a unique contribution to literature. It gives us a full account of Swift's life in London

and the manners of the times he lived in, together with many delightful confidences bestowed on his loved friend.

*The Drapier Letters* are the most important of Swift's Irish pamphlets. They have special reference to a new copper coinage it was proposed to impose on Ireland, known as Wood's halfpence.

**Joseph Addison** (1672-1719), the bright, genial and witty essayist, was the son of the Rector of Milston, in Wiltshire, and was sent, when quite a small boy, to the Charterhouse School.

His school days were marked by diligent study and by the lasting friendship he contracted with Dick Steele, the good-hearted, mischievous Irish boy who, it is to be feared, often relied on his hard-working friend for his Latin verse.

In 1687, when only fifteen, Addison went to Oxford, and a few months later gained a scholarship at Magdalen College.

Whilst still at the University he distinguished himself as a writer of Latin verse, and, in 1693, made his début as poet in a poetical address to the veteran Dryden.

Some complimentary verses to King William III. led to his receiving a pension of £300 a year. This income enabled the young writer to travel on the Continent.

After spending four years in foreign lands, Addison returned home to find his Whig patrons out of office, and therefore his hopes of preferment gone. For a short time he was reduced to a humble existence in a small room off the Haymarket, London; but his difficulties did not last long.

The Battle of Blenheim was fought in 1704, and the Government sought in vain, among the small poets of the day, for one who could celebrate the great victory in appropriate verse. At length, on the recommendation of the Earl of Halifax, Addison was appealed to. He undertook the task, and the next year saw the publication of his most popular poem, *The Campaign*. This success brought him at once into favour; he was made Commissioner of Appeal and, soon after, Under Secretary of State.



In 1709, as Secretary for Ireland, he accompanied the Lord Lieutenant to Dublin, where he gained the esteem of all parties. Swift wrote to him after his return to England, "if you will come over again, we will raise an army and make you King of Ireland."

It was during his sojourn in Ireland that Addison commenced his contributions to *The Tatler*. On the fall of the Whig Ministry, he returned to London possessed of so much wealth that he could afford to purchase an estate for £10,000.

The following years were the time of his greatest literary activity. In 1709, he started, in partnership with Steele, his famous *Spectator*. His English opera, *Rosamund*, produced in 1706, had been unsuccessful; but this failure was more than compensated for by the complete success of his Roman tragedy, *Cato*, first acted in 1713. It was received with the utmost enthusiasm by both Whigs and Tories as a great party triumph. Literary and political men joined in praising and applauding its author, and in crowning him with the title of "the great Mr. Addison." Pope writes of the play, "The town is so full of it that the orange-wenches and fruit-women in the parks offer the books at the side of the coaches, and the prologue and epilogue are cried about the streets by the common hawkers."

After the death of Queen Anne, Addison returned to his former office of Secretary for Ireland, and continued to support the Whigs in a new political paper, *The Freeholder*.

In 1716, he married Charlotte, Countess of Warwick, and spent the rest of his life, not very happily, we are told, with his wife at Holland House, Kensington. The last honour conferred on him by his appreciative Whig friends was the post of Secretary of State. He died, in 1719, at Holland House, from dropsy, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Addison's calm, sincere and virtuous character led to a contemporary calling him "a parson in a tye wig" (the kind of wig the clergy never wore). He was, perhaps, the most scholarly gentleman of the age. Undoubtedly timid and shy before strangers, but, as Lady Mary Montagu expressed it,

"the best company in the world to his friends." Swift, Steele and even Pope, wrote in praise of his conversation. His kindly, humorous and keen wit were never employed in cruel personal attacks. He was a great satirist, content to wage war against the peccadilloes and foibles of society, capable of exerting a good influence over his readers without their knowing that they were receiving a moral lecture. "It may be," says Thackeray of Addison's essays, "a lady is tried for breaking the peace of our sovereign lady, Queen Anne, and ogling too dangerously from the side box: or a Templar for beating the Watch or breaking Priscian's head: or a citizen's wife for caring too much for the puppet show, and too little for her husband and children; every one of the little sinners brought before him is amusing, and he dismisses each with the pleasantest penalties and the most charming words of admonition."

His reputation in the eighteenth century was gained as a poet, as the author of *The Campaign* and *Cato*, and as the holder of high offices in the State.

To-day his poetic fame is extinct; with the exception of some beautiful hymns, familiar to us all, his poetry is now little read. "It is as a Tatler of small talk and a Spectator of mankind that we cherish and love him." His essays, signed either C. L. I. or O., were written on a multitude of subjects—politics, the humours of society, the rivalries, fashions and flirtations of fine ladies, new plays, new books and the disputes between literary men.

He paints the manners and customs of his time with such vividness that, in imagination, we are carried back to the London life of Queen Anne's reign, and find ourselves enjoying the company of the society folk, whom he shows to us "in public, in the theatre, or the assembly, or the puppet show, or at the toy shop, higgling for gloves and lace: or at the auction battling together over a blue porcelain dragon, or a darling monster in japan: or at church, eyeing the width of their rival's hoops or the breadth of their laces as they sweep down the aisles."

The most delightful of Addison's creations is Sir Roger de Coverley, a quaint old country gentleman, true and honourable in all his dealings, but so full of whims and oddities that, whilst we love him, we can still enjoy many a good-natured laugh at his expense.

Addison's style has an irresistible charm. He always expresses himself in clear, simple and well-balanced language. As a model of good English in that particular form of literature, the light moral essay, he is unsurpassed.

From *The Spectator*, No. 108:—

#### SKETCH OF WILL WIMBLE

"As I was yesterday morning walking with Sir Roger before his house, a country fellow brought him a huge fish, which, he told him, Mr. William Wimble had caught that very morning; and that he presented it with his service to him, and intended to come and dine with him. At the same time he delivered a letter, which my friend read to me as soon as the messenger left him.

"‘SIR ROGER,—I desire you to accept of a jack, which is the best I have caught this season. I intend to come and stay with you a week, and see how the perch bite in the Black river. I observed with some concern, the last time I saw you upon the bowling-green, that your whip wanted a lash to it; I will bring half a dozen with me that I twisted last week, which I hope will serve you all the time you are in the country. I have not been out of the saddle for six days last past, having been at Eton with Sir John's eldest son. He takes to his learning hugely.

"‘I am, Sir, your humble servant,

"‘WILL WIMBLE.’

"This extraordinary letter, and message that accompanied it, made me very curious to know the character and quality of the gentleman who sent them; which I found to be as follow: Will Wimble is younger brother to a baronet, and descended of the ancient family of the Wimbles. He is now between forty and fifty; but being bred to no business and born to no estate, he generally lives with his eldest brother as superintendent of his game. He hunts a pack of dogs better than any man in the country, and is very famous for finding out a hare. He is extremely well versed in all the little handicrafts of an idle man. He makes a May-fly to a miracle; and furnishes the whole country with angle-rods. As he is a good-natured, officious



fellow, and very much esteemed on account of his family, he is a welcome guest at every house, and keeps up a good correspondence among all the gentlemen about him. He carries a tulip root in his pocket from one to another, or exchanges a puppy between a couple of friends, that live perhaps in the opposite sides of the country. These gentleman-like manufactures and obliging little humours make Will the darling of the country."

**Richard Steele** (1672-1729).—There was a good-natured Irish youth at the Charterhouse School between the years 1684-9, who worshipped the diligent, gentlemanly scholar, the top boy in the school. That top boy was Addison, and the Irish boy, who was ever ready to fag for him, to run his errands or black his shoes, was Dicky Steele.

Richard Steele, born in Dublin, and son of an Irish attorney, differed greatly in character from his scholarly friend. He was idle in school, mischievous, often in debt to the old tart woman and in disgrace with his masters; but, with all his faults, so warm-hearted, affectionate, frank and jovial that he never lacked friends.

His school character followed him through life. At Oxford he was a popular undergraduate when Addison was a stately don; and in manhood his warm, but very undisciplined heart, was ever leading him into difficulties and sorrows unknown to his serene and clear-headed friend.

Smitten with a love for military glory, Steele left the University, without a degree, to enlist as a cadet in the Horse Guards, under the command of the Duke of Ormonde.

In 1700, he was imprisoned for a short time in the Tower Guard, for having severely wounded an Irishman in a duel. In a fit of repentance the prisoner wrote a devotional treatise, *The Christian Hero*, which was the cause of amusement rather than edification to the town. Its author was deep in debt, much given to drunkenness and every other folly, and, as Thackeray says, "A theologian in liquor is not a respectable object; and a hermit, though he be out at elbows, must not be in debt to the tailor."

His next literary work took the form of plays. *The*



*Funeral; or, Grief à la Mode* and *The Tender Husband* were passing successes, but the *Lying Lover* entirely failed. It was too moral and religious, Steele declared; but, in truth, it was very dull and uninteresting.

Like nearly all the successful literary men of his time, our author obtained, through a patron, important offices in the State. In 1705 he had left the army and was holding an appointment at Court and the post of Gazetteer, which he afterwards exchanged for the office of Commissioner of Stamps. Two years later he was desperately in love with the beautiful Mary Scurlock, who became his second wife (his first wife had died some months earlier). Captain Steele, as he was commonly styled, was by no means an exemplary husband, but he dearly loved his wife and children. His extravagance and drunken habits often led him from home to drink an unlimited number of bottles of wine at the Kit Cat Club, or to hide from the bailiffs in some obscure tavern, or even at times to lie in a debtor's prison. On all these occasions he would write loving messages to his "dearest Prue," who carefully kept his letters. These have since been published, and give us a very accurate account of Steele's wild and chequered career, as well as pleasant glimpses of his kindly nature.

The best part of his literary work was done in connection with his papers, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*.

In the less important *Guardian*, *Englishman* and other short-lived papers, and in some strong pamphlets, he dealt entirely with political subjects. His championship of the Whigs made him many powerful enemies. Swift, among their number, was most bitter in his attacks.

Towards the close of Anne's reign, Steele entered Parliament as a Whig member, when the Tories were in power. He was immediately impeached for his seditious writings and expelled from the House.

He again became Member of Parliament in George I.'s reign, was knighted, and rewarded with several sinecure posts.

In spite of these appointments and the success of his last

comedy, *The Conscious Lovers*, in 1722, the improvident rake was ever in difficulties. The privacy of his many mansions was constantly being intruded on by the bailiffs. On one occasion at his grand house in Bloomsbury Square, it is recorded that he gave a dinner to a large party of guests, who were waited on by certain queer-looking fellows in livery, all bailiffs in disguise, as the host confessed. At length, giving up all he had to his creditors, Steele retired to a small property in Carmarthenshire, where he died, almost forgotten by his contemporaries, in 1729.

Steele must be regarded as the father of the English essay. Without *The Lucubrations of Isaac Bickerstaff* in *The Tatler* we should not have had Addison's delightful essays in *The Spectator*.

His fame has been somewhat overshadowed by the more perfect work of his friend; but, though sometimes careless and negligent in his style, he has given us much charming entertainment.

He had a delightful humour, and far more genuine emotion than Addison.

The first eighty numbers of *The Tatler* are entirely the work of Steele, and many delightful essays scattered through *The Spectator* are also from his pen. He nearly always originated the ideas which his more artistic colleague perfected. Thus the first sketch of Sir Roger de Coverley was Steele's creation. He must also be remembered as almost the only writer of the time who speaks with reverence and respect of women.

**Daniel Defoe** (1661-1731), the author of over two hundred books and pamphlets, is chiefly honoured to-day for his famous story of adventure, *Robinson Crusoe*.

Defoe was born in London, the son of a Nonconformist butcher of St. Giles, Cripplegate, who sent him to a good Dissenting school to be trained for the ministry.

Daniel, however, preferred to join the rebels in Monmouth's Rebellion, and after escaping from that peril served in William III.'s army in Spain and France. Tired of a soldier's calling, he became a hosier, then a brickmaker, and finally

entered the profession of literature and commenced to write for the Whigs.

His poem *A True-born Englishman*, in defence of William III., was the most popular of his early writings.

Throughout the reign of Queen Anne his pen was busy writing pamphlets and doing newspaper work. His satire *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* brought him into disgrace with the Tory Government, and he was sentenced to stand in the pillory for three days and be imprisoned during the Queen's pleasure. Quite undaunted by this disgrace, Defoe addressed a hymn to the "hieroglyphic state machine contrived to punish fancy in," which was sold in the streets, and so pleased the mob that, instead of insulting and pelting him, they crowned him with flowers and treated him in every way as a hero.

Whilst in prison Defoe started his most important newspaper, *The Review*. This paper, which is considered the forerunner of the more literary *Tatler*, is a remarkable example of his industry. It was entirely the work of his own pen, and contained papers on almost every branch of human knowledge. Its publication was continued weekly, bi-weekly, and then tri-weekly for over nine years, from 1704-13. When we add that besides *The Review*, which covers some five thousand printed pages, he wrote eighty other works during these years, we can have some idea of his fertile genius and powers of working.

He was released from prison in 1704, and employed by Harley (Lord Oxford) in secret missions to Scotland and the West of England. From that time the Whig journalist hid his principles and wrote for the Tories; for, like many other public men of the day, he was guilty of unscrupulous political actions.

His *Family Instructor* appeared in 1715. Four years later *Robinson Crusoe* was published, and at once leaped into the popular fame it has ever since held.

Defoe wrote many other stories popular in his day, and made so much money that he was able to build himself a

handsome house at Stoke Newington, on the outskirts of London. A mystery hangs over the last years of his life. He appears to have fallen into debt and other troubles, and, although he had a family, lived as lonely a life as his famous Crusoe. He died in a lodging-house at Moorfields.

Defoe's stories are so superior to the artificial romances of his predecessors that we may justly say he prepared the way for the English novel. He possessed a marvellous creative imagination, and told his tales in so natural and charming a manner that we can scarcely believe that we are not reading a true record of events. He possessed, as one of his contemporaries said, the art "of forging a story and imposing it upon the world for truth."

Among the long list of books, religious, political and social pamphlets and papers from his pen, we may remember, besides his masterpiece *Robinson Crusoe*, the two stories—*A True History of the Apparition of Mrs. Veal the Next Day after Her Death*, and *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders*—a *History of the Plague*, and a *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*.

As a writer of simple, flowing and natural English Defoe ranks with the greatest of our writers.

**George Berkeley**, Bishop of Cloyne (1685–1753).—Among the men of great intellect who lived during this period, Berkeley is one of the most distinguished. He was born in Ireland, probably in the half-ruined castle of Dysart, in Kilkenny. In 1700, he entered Trinity College, Dublin, where he remained for thirteen years, first as student and afterwards as Fellow.

From his university home he published his first works on philosophy, an *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*, and the *Treatise on Human Knowledge*. They were immediately recognised as great works.

In 1713, Berkeley paid his first visit to London. In the metropolis he made many friends, for the beauty of his character, coupled with the charm of his intellect, endeared him to all with whom he came in contact.



Pope declared that "every virtue under heaven" belonged to him, and Swift, Steele and other wits united in his praise. Whilst in London the philosopher wrote against the Free-thinkers in Steele's *Guardian*, and produced one of his most original works, *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. Soon after the appearance of this treatise he started for the Continent, and for seven years travelled abroad as chaplain and tutor. He has left an interesting account of his Continental experiences in his *Journals*.

After his return to England he was engaged in a Utopian enterprise, to found a great Missionary College in the Bermudas, whence the gospel might be preached to all America.

This scheme he was obliged to abandon for want of funds; and, being appointed Bishop of Cloyne, he spent the next eighteen years of his life in Ireland. In the course of them, he wrote important treatises on *The Social State of Ireland*, and a brilliant work called *Siris* on the virtues of tar-water as a medicine. His health failing, he, in 1752, retired from his bishopric to spend the remainder of his days at Oxford. He died suddenly in 1753.

Berkeley was a great original thinker, whose influence has been felt by all succeeding philosophers. His philosophy need not detain us here. He fully set forth his theories in the *Treatise on Human Knowledge* (1710) and in the *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713). In *Alciphron, the Minute Philosopher*, he combated the attacks of the Deists on revealed religion.

## IX.

# THE AGE OF JOHNSON

(1740 TO ABOUT 1790)

WE now turn from the bright and brilliant essays of *The Spectator* and the brilliant verse of Pope to the ponderous massive writing of "Dictionary Johnson."

There are some few changes in literature to recount, although no strictly marked boundary divides the years of Dr. Johnson's reign from those of the brilliant wits who preceded him.

We notice first that the group of writers who made London their home was broken up, and that men of wit and talent were writing from many parts of the kingdom. It was still an age of prose, but not quite the prose of Queen Anne's day; the simple, well-balanced language of Addison was discarded by many leading authors for pompous and laboured sentences.

Grub Street, with all its terrors, still existed for the poor author; and the coffee-houses were still the resort of the more prosperous. But better times were dawning for the professional writer; for Dr. Johnson succeeded, without patron or money, in forcing his way through the ranks of the unfortunate scribblers and booksellers' hacks to the chief place of honour in the coffee-house, to reign the last of the line of literary dictators who had dominated literature since the days of Ben Jonson.

Dr. Johnson was not a very great writer; his contributions to literature, compared with those of our greatest authors, were

insignificant ; but he was the ruling spirit of the time. His opinions, often prejudiced, but always honest, sincere and tempered by much common sense, governed the literary world of England, and, through his wonderful biographer, Boswell, are so familiar to us to-day that we can scarcely read any book written during these years, or consider any event of the day without knowing what Dr. Johnson said of it.

He strikes the keynote of the period, and is, perhaps, the greatest personality in the whole range of English literature. We know him in every phase of his life : we go with him to the coffee-house ; we drink tea with him at home or with his friend Mrs. Thrale ; we hear him encouraging or giving a little chastisement to some aspiring poet or prose writer ; or adversely criticising (but allowing no one else to) the great actor David Garrick ; or laying down the laws of art to the great painter Sir Joshua Reynolds ; or revelling in the charms of Fleet Street ; or declaiming against country life and scenery.

On the shores of Loch Ness, on the one long journey of his life—his Scotch tour—he remarked : “ It will very readily occur that this uniformity of barrenness can afford very little amusement to the traveller ; that it is easy to sit at home and conceive rocks and heath and waterfalls ; and that these journeys are useless labour, which neither impregnate the imagination nor enlarge the understanding.”

And this, to us, extraordinary description of a beautiful mountain scene expressed not only Dr. Johnson's opinion, but the opinion of the age ; for, although through the making of better roads, the rattle of many post-chaises and coaches might be heard in the country, the majority of travellers thought only of the inns, the roads and the dangers likely to be encountered from highway robbers : they had not yet learned to see anything beautiful in the country they passed through.

But the dawn of a love for Nature was gradually breaking, and in poetry we see the first signs of a coming revolution in taste.

**Poetry.**—The years we are considering produced two kinds of poets—some who remained faithful to the classical artificial teaching of Dryden and Pope, and others who, carrying on the work commenced by Thomson, learned that God made the country, and that the singing of birds, the natural loveliness of mountain and valley, of river and meadow, of flowers and trees and the real life of the peasant, were better food for the poet than political quibbles and satires and the foibles of artificial society life. To them, true poetic feeling was more important than exactness of form and rigidity of style.

Amongst the writers of verse who remained true to the school of Pope and wrote on artificial subjects in the heroic metre or in stilted blank verse, were Johnson, Churchill, Akenside, Goldsmith (who possessed a natural grace not possessed by the rest) and Erasmus Darwin, whose *Botanic Garden* is the climax of this artificial poetry.

Chief among the earliest pioneers of the natural romantic school were Thomas Gray and William Collins.

Gray, the author of the most beautiful elegy in our language, introduced a melodious, richly-rhymed measure; and Collins, whose noble lyrics have gained him lasting honour, employed equally musical verse.

These two poets mark the growth of a new order of poetry, not only in England, but on the Continent; for their work, though at first accepted with diffidence, as needing apologies for its crudeness, was a harbinger of a new school of poetry abroad as well as at home.

Nor were Gray and Collins the only influences working towards a new school of poetry. A series of poems known as *The Paraphrases of Ossian* (1762); the romantic verse of the unhappy boy Chatterton; *The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* of Bishop Percy (1765); and Warton's *History of English Poetry* (1774–81); all assisted in preparing the way for a revolution in taste.

*The Paraphrases of Ossian*, really the work of a Scotchman named Macpherson, were supposed to be translations of



ancient Celtic poetry discovered in the Highlands of Scotland. Their primitive unfettered verse created quite a sensation in Europe.

The romantic Chatterton's pretended discovery of ancient English poetry in *The Rowley Poems* was almost equally discussed, and the work of Bishop Percy and Thomas Warton took readers back to Chaucer and Spenser, and gave to the reading public a splendid collection of old English ballads.

Before the close of the century, between the years 1780-90, the coming change is clearly shown in the four poets—William Cowper, George Crabbe, William Blake and Robert Burns.

Cowper sometimes clings to the classical school, but his best work, *The Task* (1785), is teeming with natural human interest, expressed with grace and simple pathos.

George Crabbe, in his *Village* (1783), entirely overthrew the happy shepherds and shepherdesses of Pope's school, and drew a touching picture of the sorrows, miseries and hopeless poverty of the real peasant.

Blake's lyrics are unrivalled in our language for their simplicity, delicacy and tenderness; and Burns, the great national poet of Scotland, wrote love songs as enchanting as Elizabethan lays, besides a mass of charming rural poetry. He was the embodiment of the natural in poetry—a poet who sang, like the birds, by instinct.

In **Prose** these years are noteworthy for the discovery of that most popular nineteenth-century form of literature, the modern novel.

The old Elizabethan days, when people went to the theatre for their instruction as well as amusement, and only the learned read books, had, as we have already seen, gradually passed away. The reading public was every day increasing, and craved something fresher and more real than the heroic romances which had charmed their ancestors. Hence the popularity of *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*, the romantic narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*, and the gruesome story of *Gulliver's Travels*.

**The Novel.**—But nothing which dealt with the workings of the human heart and revealed the lives and characters of everyday people had appeared in England, or indeed in Europe, before the publication, in 1740, of *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson.

The fat little London printer completely understood the ordinary woman's nature. Even to-day, living in an age of great novelists, on reading the long, spun-out history of *Pamela*, and his greater conception, *Clarissa*, we are struck by the natural pathos and reality of his work.

In an age when stories full of human interest were unknown, his books were eagerly read throughout the length and breadth of the land, and gained for their author not only the sentimental admiration of all the young ladies of England, but the honoured respect of such a worthy critic as Dr. Johnson.

The work commenced by Richardson was brought to greater perfection by Henry Fielding. Fielding introduced a manliness and vigour into his books which are absent from Richardson's. His work is marred by coarseness, and he had not the same sympathetic knowledge of woman, but he is a much greater writer. His most famous book, *Tom Jones*, has been declared by some critics to be the finest novel ever published.

Linked with Richardson and Fielding are the names of five other novelists, whose work during the twenty-five years between 1740–65 added masterpieces to our literature.

Tobias Smollett had less originality than Richardson or Fielding; his work is coarse, his characters oftentimes caricatures, but he has written much that is brilliant and entertaining in his three novels, *Roderick Random*, *Humphrey Clinker*, and *Peregrine Pickle*. Laurence Sterne is scarcely a novelist at all; but he has bequeathed to us in *Tristram Shandy* and *The Sentimental Journey* two of the daintiest, most original, and wittiest books conceivable. Dr. Johnson, in his most pompous and classic manner, contributed the learned and, it must be owned, wearisome *Rasselas*. Horace Walpole wrote a story of mediæval times in *Castle Otranto*; and Oliver

Goldsmith, perhaps the most charming writer of them all, drew a picture of simple country folk in a graceful and gentle manner in his famous *Vicar of Wakefield*.

Other novelists there were, popular in their day—Miss Burney's *Evelina* and *Cecilia* are the first society novels; and a vogue for melancholy romances was started by H. Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771)—but, after the death of Smollett, no great name appears till the nineteenth century ushered in a new era in novel-writing in the works of Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen.

**History.**—In the course of our wandering through literature from the days of the old Saxon *Chronicle* we have had occasion to notice books on events in history, or on kings or leading men—all interesting in showing the growth of historical records from the quaint legends of poets or crude prose statements of monks to such memoirs as Sir Thomas More's *History of Edward V.* or such personal narratives of events as Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion*. But, before the year 1753, no history had been produced in England which entered into the causes and results of the events recorded, and at the same time sought after excellence of style.

David Hume was the first to attempt this work for his countrymen, and, though his reasoning is sometimes wrong and he wrote without a complete knowledge of facts, he performed a noble service as the author of the first literary *History of England*, finished in 1761. Dr. Robertson, in his *History of Scotland*, followed in the footsteps of Hume; but the greatest of eighteenth-century historians was Edward Gibbon. His *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the result of twenty years' patient toil and exhaustive research (1768–88), is far more exact in facts than Hume or Robertson, and is a masterpiece of eighteenth-century prose.

In **Philosophy** and **Science** writers were chiefly engaged in promoting their special subjects, and cared little for literary renown. Hume ranks high as philosopher as well as historian. His treatises and essays are all important works.

Adam Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations*, may be said to have created the science of political economy; and Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* is another memorable book.

In **Politics**, the *Letters of Junius*, an anonymous publication containing violent attacks on the King and the Duke of Grafton (published 1769-72), was widely read and discussed. But by far the greatest political writer, as well as the greatest orator of the day, was Edmund Burke, whose treatise, *Thoughts on the Cause of the present Discontents*, was published in 1770.

Many of his works were written after 1789, but in style he is a contemporary of Dr. Johnson, who claimed him as belonging to the charmed circle of his friends when he said, "We, who know Mr. Burke, know that he will be one of the first men in the country."

**Miscellaneous Writers.**—As in the earlier years of the century, letter-writing continued to be one of the most delightful forms of literature. The poets Gray and Cowper are alike charming, graceful and natural in their letters to their friends. Gibbon's letters are worthy examples of so great a man, and Horace Walpole's *Familiar Letters*, although written with one eye on his correspondent and the other on the public, that he hoped would one day read them, contain many charming and picturesque descriptions.

But the most important figure among the miscellaneous writers is Dr. Johnson. His essays in his periodicals *The Rambler* and *The Idler*, his *magnum opus* the *Dictionary*, which scarcely belongs to literature, and his *Lives of the English Poets* form many volumes of ponderous reading.

For the truest and best form of biography, the study of a man's life set before us as a living picture, we turn to the works of William Mason and James Boswell.

**First Example of Modern Biography.**—William Mason was the first English writer to discard the eulogies and artificial descriptions adopted by all previous biographers. He told the life of the poet Gray from his letters and from the recollections of his friends.



Boswell's *Life of Dr. Johnson* comes, in point of time, after Mason's work, but is far more famous.

He paints the portrait of his hero with the skill of an artist. His life is unfolded like a novel; his doings, his sayings, his habits and opinions are recorded with the greatest accuracy, and the whole story is told in the most delightful gossipy style.

Biography has, since Boswell's time, become a very popular branch of literature; but no writer has surpassed, or even equalled, the spontaneous, truthful and fascinating Boswell.

Two other works claim our attention in passing these years in review—Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne* drew people's attention to natural history and the peaceful scenes of country life; and Sir Joshua Reynolds, first President of the Royal Academy, produced, in his *Discourses on Painting*, our first literary work on Art.

**Drama.**—Of the productions for the stage, the comedies of Goldsmith and Sheridan have alone become classics. Innumerable plays and burlesques were written only to be forgotten, and Dr. Johnson's austere tragedy has sunk into oblivion.

But *The Good Natured Man* and *She Stoops to Conquer*, of Oliver Goldsmith, and *The Rivals* and *School for Scandal*, of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, still attract and interest us.

These comedies grew out of the work of Congreve and Wycherley; they belong to the same school of drama, but are free from the coarseness and indecency which have long since banished the works of the earlier playwrights from the stage.

With Sheridan's caustic, entertaining caricatures of a society which contained many characters like his Lady Teazle and Joseph Surface, we bring our period to a close. We stand on the eve of great historical events, and a great change is gradually coming over the thoughts and actions of mankind throughout the civilised world.

The characteristics of eighteenth-century literature—the horror of enthusiasm or any display of feeling, the delight in cold and sceptical reasoning, the sacrificing of true feeling to

polished writing, brilliant wit and satire—are passing away. In the new love for nature displayed in the melodious verse of some of the poets of the last half of the century, in the tender, pathetic sympathy for the poor seen in such writers as Goldsmith and in the preaching of the great evangelists Wesley and Whitfield, the change has commenced. We leave the brilliant crowd of eighteenth-century wits to embark on a new era in literature, in which authors are inspired by a new world of thought, action and emotion.

### POETS

**Thomas Gray** (1716–1771).—On the eventful night of the year 1759, the eve of the taking of Quebec, when General Wolfe was being silently rowed from post to post to see that all was ready for the attack on the citadel, the hero, who was to die for his country on the morrow, sat in the stern of his boat quietly reciting Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*.

At the close of the poem he said to his companions, "I would prefer being the author of that poem to the glory of beating the French to-morrow."

It was a worthy tribute to the genius of the shy, modest man who was at that time spending his days in the reading-room, just opened, in the British Museum, absorbed in his books, and only anxious to escape from the poet's fame his *Elegy* had brought him.

Thomas Gray was the son of a money scrivener of Cornhill, a jealous, violent man, whose gentle wife was at length compelled to separate from him and to open a shop as a means of providing for herself and her little boy.

Through the care of this fond mother the son was sent to Eton, where he made two lasting friendships, with Horace Walpole, son of the Prime Minister, and with a promising boy named West.

Gray and Walpole left Eton for Cambridge, and continued their schoolboy comradeship at the University. They both had artistic and poetic tastes, and Gray had no sympathy

with the mathematical studies which prevailed at that time at Cambridge. His love was for the classics. Latin and Greek literature was the one passion of his life.

In his undergraduate days he was a quiet and unassuming scholar, subject to fits of melancholy and dejection.

Leaving the University without a degree in 1738, he accepted the invitation of his friend Horace Walpole to accompany him on a tour through France, Italy and Switzerland. Differences arose between the two young men, and Gray at length left his friend at Reggio and returned home to find his father dying and his dear school comrade West hopelessly ill.

After his father's death, family affairs had to be arranged, and then our poet settled for a time with his mother and aunt in the sweet village of Stoke Pogis, Bucks.

This village will ever be associated with the life of Gray, for it was in the churchyard of its quaint little church that he commenced, in 1742, his immortal *Elegy*.

The same year he returned to Cambridge, took his bachelorship in civil law, and became absorbed in the study of Greek literature.

In the peaceful society of his books and a few intimate friends, of whom Horace Walpole was once more the chief, the melancholy young poet had his greatest pleasures.

His holidays were spent at Stoke Pogis, with Walpole at Strawberry Hill, or in travelling about England. He had been one of the first to discover the rugged grandeur of the Alps; his later travels led him to admire the beauties of the English lakes and the picturesque wildness of the Highlands of Scotland.

His poems were mostly composed during the hours of relaxation from study, and distributed among his friends in manuscript. In this way the famous ode, finished in 1750, was read by Walpole, who was so delighted with it that he could not resist redistributing copies to more of his acquaintances than his modest friend approved. At length it got into the hands of an enterprising publisher, and Gray was compelled to appear before the world as a poet.

After the death of his mother, in 1753, he devoted himself more than ever to a life of study at Cambridge. He was one of the first scholars of the age, and prepared copious notes for meditated prose works, which unfortunately were never written. Even Dr. Johnson, who was unable to appreciate his verse, wrote: "Perhaps Mr. Gray was the most learned man in Europe."

The poet laureateship was offered to him and refused; but he held during the last years of his life the professorship of history and modern languages at Cambridge, a post which entailed few duties and gave him an income of four hundred pounds a year.

Bad health and deep fits of dejection clouded his latter days. He died at Cambridge, and was buried by his mother's side in the churchyard of Stoke Pogis.

Thus ended a very uneventful life, enlivened and made happy by the loving attachment of friends. To the outside world Gray presented a shy and silent figure, to his intimate friends he displayed an intensely loving nature.

As poet, he stands midway between the old artificial school and the new era of natural poetry. His work is but a slight garland of verse; but, though small in quantity, it has gained for him the poet's laurels.

"As an elegiac poet," says the modern poet Swinburne, "he holds for all ages to come his unassailable and sovereign station."

The *Elegy* is by far the most popular of his poems. Its sublime dignity, musical measures and exquisite grace must appeal to every lover of poetry.

His other works include *Pindaric Odes* (of which the *Progress of Poesy* is most esteemed), *The Bard*, *Ode to Spring*, *Hymn to Adversity*, *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton*, and some humorous verse *On Mr. Walpole's Cat*.

**William Collins** (1721-1759).—When William Collins died hopelessly insane, in 1759, his name was so little known to fame that no paper or magazine made mention of his death. Time has, however, placed the poet's wreath upon his tomb;



and to-day Mr. Swinburne writes : "The sweet name, the lucid memory of his (Collins's) genius will only pass away with all relics and all records of lyric poetry in England."

Of the life of this poet of beautiful lyrics there is not much to tell. He was the son of a hatter of Chichester. Educated at Winchester, he proceeded to Oxford, and took his degree in 1743.

Whilst at the University he wrote his first poem, *The Persian Eclogues*, afterwards called *Oriental Eclogues*.

We next find him in London trying to make a living by literature. Whilst struggling for existence in the metropolis he wrote the odes on which his fame now rests. They were little appreciated at the time, and brought him neither wealth nor fame.

On the death of an uncle, in 1749, he inherited two thousand pounds, and retired to Chichester, in which city his later poems were written. Mental disease came upon him in 1753 from which he never recovered.

As poet, Collins is, like Gray, a link between the classical and romantic schools. He was by nature a poet; he could not refrain from pouring forth exquisite lyric song.

His most admired odes are : *To Evening*, *The Passions*, *To Liberty*, *To Mercy*, *On the Death of the Poet Thomson*, *How sleep the Brave*.

**Thomas Chatterton** (1752-1770).—Of all the tragic stories scattered through the history of literature, none is more sad than the short life of Thomas Chatterton. Born at Bristol, the son of a sub-chanter at the cathedral, who died before the poet's birth, he was brought up from his earliest years in the hard school of poverty. His mother, a poor schoolmistress and needlewoman, did her utmost for her apparently dull little boy, who only learned to read, at the age of seven, through the attractive picture letters of an old music book. At the Bluecoat School of Bristol, however, this dull boy soon developed into an ardent, intelligent and dreamy student.

He devoured poetry, history, heraldry, antiquities and music; and loved to spend his holidays among the archives

of the Church of St. Mary Radcliffe, poring over ancient manuscripts. At a very early age he had developed a marvellous power of imitating antique poetry. He wrote his first poem, *On the Last Epiphany*, when only ten years old ; and four years later concocted, as a joke, a huge pedigree for a certain pewterer of Bristol. This production brought him his first literary earnings—a crown. It was followed by a poem, *On Bristol Bridge*, which he pretended was from an old thirteenth-century manuscript.

In 1767, he was apprenticed to an attorney in Bristol, and condemned to the uncongenial work of an office boy.

All his spare moments were spent in study or writing verse, and by 1769 he had composed a number of antique poems. One of these, which he styled *The Rise of Peyncteyne, written by T. Rowley, 1469, for Master Canynge*, he sent to Horace Walpole, who thought it was a genuine old poem.

In 1770 the marvellous boy left Bristol to try his fortune in London.

Arriving in the great city of his ambition, with very little money in his possession, he commenced an awful struggle for fame. At first fortune smiled somewhat upon him. He wrote poems, essays, stories and articles of every description, and succeeded in getting publishers to accept them, though at the starvation rate of payment of from a farthing to twopence a line. He also obtained an introduction to the Lord Mayor, Beckford ; and at the end of his first two months in London, wrote home to his mother a happy, hopeful letter, and sent her a present bought with his first earnings.

These early successes, however, did not continue. The Lord Mayor died, and the publishers had enough of his work. To live by literature in those Grub Street days was a hard, hard life, and Chatterton was a proud boy ; he was ready to write day and night for a few pence, but to beg he was ashamed.

He moved from his lodging, in the house of some friends in Shoreditch, lest they should see his poverty, and took a garret in Brooke Street, Holborn.

There he continued his miserable existence for a short time, living, sometimes, on one loaf a week, "bought stale to make it last longer." His neighbours tried in vain to help him; he would accept nothing from them, and at last, when starvation seemed inevitable, he shut himself up in his garret, tore up his manuscripts and poisoned himself.

He was buried in the pauper's pit of Shoe Lane Workhouse.

What place Chatterton would have held in the ranks of English poets, had he lived and developed his artistic genius, we cannot tell. But for a boy of seventeen—aye, for a full-grown man—he did marvellous work.

He died starving in a garret in 1770. Could he, perhaps, have had one glance into the glass of fame, and seen his sweet and sad *Ballad of Charity* charming the nineteenth-century reader, he might have gained the courage to continue his fight with the hardships and disappointments which surrounded him.

He left the world a mass of antique poems, dramas, epics and lyrics, which, published some years after his death, under the name of *The Rowley Poems*, puzzled many a critic, and gave rise to a discussion as to their being genuine works of antiquity which lasted over eighty years.

**William Cowper** (1731-1800) was the son of the Rector of Berkhamstead. Of his early years the poet himself has given us a beautiful picture in a charming poem *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture*, written in old age and madness but not forgetfulness. Unfortunately for the poet this fond mother died when he was only six years old, and his father despatched him at once to school. He was a shy, timid and melancholy little boy, and suffered a martyrdom from the rough teasing of his schoolfellows.

From Westminster he entered an attorney's office to study law. He was called to the bar in 1754, and practised for some time in London. It was during these years that he fell in love with his cousin Theodora, whose father, Sir Ashley Cowper, would not allow the young couple to get married. This trouble preying on Cowper's mind, together with excitement caused by his appointment to two clerkships in the

House of Lords, led to his first attack of insanity. He attempted to commit suicide, and then, struck with remorse, fell a victim to religious melancholy. Through the care of a good physician of St. Alban's he was ultimately restored, and, having formed a friendship with a good family—the Unwins—settled with them at Huntingdon and afterwards at Olney. In the quiet, genial pleasures of a simple country life he spent many happy years, marred only by occasional fits of melancholy.

It was at Mrs. Unwin's suggestion that Cowper made his first essay as poet. His first volume, published in 1782, was little noticed, but his best work, published 1785, which included *The Task* and *John Gilpin*, brought him considerable fame.

The last years of his life were clouded by frequent attacks of insanity. He died at East Dereham, Norfolk.

In his contributions to literature we see, perhaps more than in any other poet of the last years of the eighteenth century, that a love for nature was gradually becoming the pervading influence in poetry. Cowper added to this feeling for the beauty of landscape a warm sympathy for man. He was inspired by a simple human affection which caused him to see all mankind as a brotherhood. He had, also, an intense religious belief, and sought in his poetry to draw people from the vanity of the world to the worship of God. The poet, he declared, should be a teacher who would lead sinners from the vices of society and the town back to Nature as God had made her, and through all that is good and beautiful to God Himself.

His poetry lacks passion and great conceptions, but is imbued with pathos and humour. In his greatest work, *The Task* (1785), he describes himself, his simple country life, his friends, the poor folk of his district and the peaceful, happy charm of the meadow and plough land, of the groves, heaths, and hedgerows which surrounded the village of Olney, on the banks of the Ouse.

His other poems include *Table Talk*, *Conversation*, *Retire-*



*ment*, *Tiroconium*, *The Olney Hymns*, many ballads (including *John Gilpin*), and the two exquisite poems written during the last years of his life, *Address to My Mother's Picture* and *My Mary*. Some of his lesser pieces are written in the smooth-rhymed couplet so popular in the eighteenth century, but for his greater works he employed blank verse, which, though never so grand as the glorious music of the poet he most loved, Milton, has a sweetness and power which is peculiarly his own.

**Robert Burns** (1759-1796) holds a unique place in the literature of Scotland, and is also an important member of that little band of poets who succeeded in killing the eighteenth-century artificial poetry and in originating a new era of natural romantic verse.

He was born at Alloway, in Ayrshire, in a cottage which his father, a small farmer, had built with his own hands. It was a poor, struggling household, and the little boy Robert had, very early in life, to do much hard work about the farm.

For education the good farmer did all he could for his sons. The teaching of the village school of Alloway was supplemented by help from a Mr. John Murdoch, and, in the home-life of the farm, after the troubles of the day were over, father and sons would spend their evenings poring over the books which formed their scanty library. Among these treasures were a metrical life of William Wallace, the poems of Allan Ramsay and a popular contemporary poet, Robert Fergusson.

In the household at Alloway there was likewise an old woman, Betty Davidson, who was deeply learned in Scottish folk-lore.

Young Robert Burns grew to manhood with her songs and tales ringing in his ears, and very early in life commenced writing verse himself.

At the age of twenty-three he started as a flax-dresser at Irvine, but soon returned home again without money, and having acquired dissolute habits which he never succeeded in shaking off.

On his father's death, he carried on the home farm with his brother, but with no success. The farm went to ruin, but the young farmer, in the hours of his despair, was writing poems destined to make him famous. By the year 1786, Burns's affairs had become so desperate that he resolved to emigrate to Jamaica, and, in order to obtain the necessary money for the journey, published at Kilmarnock a volume of poems.

They sold rapidly, and soon the poet had enough money to carry out his plans. He took his passage and was about to sail, when the persuasions of a few admiring friends induced him to retrace his steps to Edinburgh. Here he became for a short time a society lion, and a reprint of his poems realised £500.

On the strength of this money he, in 1787, married an old village love, Jean Armour, and started farming again at Ellisland, near Dumfries. A year later he was appointed an exciseman, a post which, though it brought him a very necessary £70 a year, exposed him to drinking temptations he was unfortunately too weak to resist.

The farm at Ellisland, like all the other poet's ventures, proved a failure, and, in 1791, he removed to Dumfries and published a third edition of his poems, enriched with many beautiful songs and the famous tale of *Tam o' Shanter*. The hard struggles of his early life and the dissipations of manhood had by this time combined to ruin his health. He lived on another five years, dying at Dumfries in 1796.

Burns was indeed a poet born, not made; possessing the very genius of song, he poured forth passionate, natural verse. He possessed a love for nature and a keen sympathy with the hard life of the Scotch peasants, which only one who had fought with them the fight for existence could have had.

It is hard to select from the riches of song with which he endowed his country any particular poem as his best. His was a most versatile genius. He could sing exquisite love songs, like *My Nannie O!* and *Mary Morrison*; or write of beautiful country scenes, as in *Ye Banks and Braes*; or paint

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sympathetic pictures of home-life, as in the *Cotter's Saturday Night*; or tell a half-serious, half-comic story, as in *Tam o' Shanter*; or burst into frolic and satire, as in the *Jolly Beggars* and the *Holy Fair*.

Whatever he attempts is marked by genius. As a lyrical poet he is second to none; the exquisite melody of his verse, his knowledge of the human heart and of the sad and jovial experience of life, and above all his poet's eye for the beauties of nature, place him at the head of all Scotland's poets far and away above every other Scottish competitor for the poet's fame.

### PROSE WRITERS

Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784).—There is no one in the whole history of English literature we know so much about as the great lexicographer, Dr. Johnson. In his faithful disciple, Boswell, he had an ardent admirer and a constant and most observant companion. Day by day Boswell followed the great man about, obtained his opinions on every possible subject, noted in the minutest details his habits and life, and, after his death, gave the world the most wonderful biography that has ever been published. If we wish to become really acquainted with Dr. Johnson we go to Boswell's Life.

There we see him at his home in Fleet Street, with his friends the Thrales or in the chair of honour at his club. Everywhere he is drinking huge potions of tea and thundering forth the most decided opinions on men and things. Yet, with all his dogmatic tyranny, he is so lovable, so tender-hearted and noble, that long before we reach the end of the book we are, like Boswell, his ardent admirers, and feel there could scarcely be anyone in literature so well worth knowing.

His great intelligence and the nobleness of his character have not one stain upon them. He passed through the worst struggles of poverty and oppression with the most splendid courage and fortitude, and rose to the highest pinnacle of contemporary literary fame. In poverty and in prosperity he is ever the same honest, God-fearing, tender-hearted man.

Born at Lichfield in 1709, Samuel Johnson's early years were spent in his father's second-hand book shop.

He was a clumsy and ungainly boy, afflicted with a bad form of skin disease, which added to his natural ugliness; and inheriting from his father "a vile melancholy," a tendency to depression and despair, which remained with him throughout life.

After learning to read at a dame's school, young Samuel was sent to Lichfield Grammar School, where a great deal of Latin was "whipped into him" and he acquired a reputation as a prodigy of learning. He was of very indolent habits, but being possessed of a wonderful memory and quickness of apprehension, absorbed a large amount of learning, partly at school, but, perhaps chiefly, from the books in his father's shop.

Poverty pressed upon his family even in his school days, for the good people of Lichfield did not greatly patronise the bookseller; eventually, however, with the help of a friend, the elder Johnson was enabled to send his son to Oxford. At the University his talents were recognised, but he was too miserably poor to enjoy his student life.

On one occasion his shoes were so old and worn that a good-natured fellow-student resolved to place a new pair at his door. Johnson was much too proud, however, to accept this well-meant gift. In great indignation he threw them out of the window.

In 1731, supplies from home entirely failed, and the poor undergraduate was obliged to leave the University without a degree. His doctor's degree was an honorary title conferred in later years.

On first leaving college he took the post of usher in a school, but found his duties so uncongenial that he soon gave them up to try literary work in Birmingham. Here, in 1735, he met a fair widow of forty-six, himself a young man of twenty-six, and, without money or prospects, married her. Of Mrs. Johnson we know very little; she does not appear to have been an attractive lady, but the Doctor was very fond



of her. "Sir, it was a love match on both sides," he declared many years afterwards; and to the memory of his "dear Tetty" (as he called her) he remained faithful to the day of his death.

With the few hundred pounds which constituted Mrs. Johnson's fortune, the newly-married pair started a boarding-school near Lichfield.

The school was a failure, and the unsuccessful school-master, accompanied by one of his pupils, David Garrick (who later became a great actor), journeyed to London, in 1737, to seek for work. He arrived in the metropolis with a tragedy and twopence-halfpenny in his pocket, and was at once plunged into the deepest miseries of Grub Street life.

For long he toiled at ill-paid work, translating for booksellers, especially one Cave, and doing other literary drudgery. Sometimes he was dinnerless, occasionally bedless, for we hear of his walking round St. James's Square all night because he had no lodging; yet, with all these hardships, he was steadily looking upwards, and very gradually working his way towards fame. In his first poem, *London*, he speaks from his own experience when he says—

"this mournful truth  
Is everywhere confess'd,  
Slow rises worth by poverty oppressed."

His wife came up to share his poverty towards the close of 1737, and the following year a gleam of hope came into his life with the publication of *London*, which gained a favourable notice from the prosperous Pope, and was the means of his obtaining an appointment on the staff of the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

In 1747, he started his herculean task of preparing a complete dictionary of the English language.

It was indeed a hard, unremunerative labour for a poor man like Johnson to attempt without some patron's assistance; but he accomplished it. When almost completed, Lord Chesterfield, who had declined to help at the beginning of the work, offered the great lexicographer his patronage.

Johnson refused this belated offer in a letter which is a masterpiece of passion, independence and powerful writing.

On the death of his wife, in 1752, he was plunged into the deepest grief; but with that courage which had ever sustained him, he shut himself up in the garret of the house they had occupied together in Fleet Street, the only room that she never entered, and found relief for his sorrows in work.

Poverty made its final exit from his door in 1762, when the Government granted him a pension of £300 a year. This annuity was quite a fortune to so provident a man.

He had not only enough for his own simple wants, but was able to offer a home to two homeless, and it is to be feared not too grateful, friends, as well as to a negro whom he retained as a servant, though the outside world could never discover of what his services consisted. He certainly did not brush his master's coat or powder his wig. In his personal appearance, Dr. Johnson was always a scandal to lovers of propriety.

But his acts of benevolence were unceasing; no case of poverty ever came within his reach that he did not hold out a helping hand. To Oliver Goldsmith and other brethren poorer than himself, he was ever a friend in need; and he would put pennies into the hands of little sleeping street Arabs, as he walked home from his club at night, that they might have something to buy a breakfast with in the morning. His position among literary men was by this time well assured; he reigned in the world of literature an absolute monarch.

In the famous literary club which he founded in 1764, and which included among its original members Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke and Oliver Goldsmith, he delighted to fold his legs and have out his talk to a little crowd of appreciative and reverent listeners. After 1765, he spent a great deal of his time in the household of Mr. Thrale, whose wife did much to make his life happy.

Innumerable stories of his habits and doings during these years may be read in Boswell's faithful record: his strong

Tory principles in politics, his "*hardened and shameless*" tea-drinking, his growls against the Scotch, his admiration for London, together with vivid pictures of his personal appearance. We see him a huge, massive, clumsy man, dressed in a greasy coat, a by no means immaculate shirt, and a large grey wig, burnt in the front (for he was so short-sighted that he generally read with his wig in the candle). Not even Mrs. Thrale could make him a presentable figure for a drawing-room. Uncouth in manners and slovenly in dress, a bear in outward appearance, he remained till the end of his life; though, as Garrick remarked, he possessed nothing of the bear but his skin.

In 1773, he was persuaded by Boswell to visit Scotland, a very terrific enterprise for the inveterate Londoner. An account of this tour he published in his *Journey to the Hebrides*. Possibly he enjoyed himself, though he saw nothing to admire in Scotch scenery.

One other important literary production marked the latter part of his life, *The Lives of the English Poets*.

His last years were clouded by the deaths of many of his friends, and, in 1783, he was himself struck down by paralysis. He rallied for a time, but passed peacefully away in the following year, surrounded by a little crowd of loving friends.

He was buried in Westminster Abbey, among the host of great men who have found their last resting-place within its ancient walls. Many greater names are inscribed on those tombs, but there are none whom we can remember with greater respect than this embodiment of common sense and truthfulness, this hater of shams, Dr. Samuel Johnson.

The great lexicographer is better loved to-day for his inherent good qualities and his splendid conversational powers than for his writings. Thanks to Boswell's masterly record we are far more entertained by the Doctor's sayings on men and things than by his pompous and monotonous works.

As a talker he was natural and unconstrained, as a writer he used "too big words, and too many of them." His most elaborate works are the *Dictionary* and *The Lives of the Poets*.

The *Dictionary* scarcely belongs to literature, but is interesting historically, as the first English dictionary worthy the name.

On *The Lives of the Poets* his reputation as a writer chiefly rests. We no longer accept his dogmatic assertions that Cowley was the first correct English poet, nor assign the great Milton to the little nook Johnson prepared for him; but the *Lives* are interesting in showing the current ideas of the age on poetry, and are still delightful reading for their vigorous strong sense and individual judgment. His other prose works include the essays in *The Rambler* and *Idler*, the novel *Rasselas*, which has been well described as "little more than a set of essays on life, with just story enough to hold them together," and a life of a contemporary and unsuccessful author named Savage, written in Johnson's early struggling days, and interesting as a picture of Grub Street life. He also wrote two strictly classical poems, *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, one very wearisome tragedy, *Irene*, and made an adaptation of *Juvenal*.

Specimen of Dr. Johnson's style from his *Life of Dryden*:—

"Of Dryden's works it was said by Pope that 'he could select from them better specimens of every mode of poetry than any other English writer could supply.' Perhaps no nation ever produced a writer that enriched his language with such variety of models. To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre, the refinement of our language, and much of the correctness of our sentiments. By him we were taught, *sapere et fari*, to think naturally and express forcibly. Though Davies has reasoned in rhyme before him, it may be perhaps maintained that he was the first who joined argument with poetry. He shewed us the true bounds of a translator's liberty. What was said of Rome, adorned by Augustus may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden, 'lateritiam invenit, marmoream reliquit.' He found it brick, and he left it marble."

**Oliver Goldsmith** (1728-1774), the careless and imprudent man who was prone to go to Dr. Johnson for assistance in his troubles, presents a very different figure in literature from that of the great dictator.



As a conversationalist he took a very low place in those immortal club-gatherings presided over by the Doctor.

Only the kindness of the all-powerful president could save him from constant ridicule; yet, to-day, we turn to Goldsmith's sweet, idyllic plays and to his novels, with far greater pleasure than to the massive prose of his great contemporary. Poor Oliver, like Johnson, was of unprepossessing appearance, and suffered in his early life the pains of poverty, but he was wanting in Johnson's fortitude and common sense. To the last day of his eventful life, he remained good-natured, imprudent Noll.

He was born in the remote Irish village of Pallas, in Longford. His father, a Protestant clergyman, he describes in several of his books. Oliver was one of the eight children in a by no means wealthy household. At the age of six he was sent to the village school, where he gained the reputation of being a stupid, heavy blockhead, little better than a fool. An attack of small-pox, in early childhood, disfigured him for life. An idle school career was followed by an equally idle time at Trinity College, Dublin, which he entered, in 1744, as sizar.

Love of pleasure and lack of money led him into many a college scrape, but he ultimately took his degree, and was ordered by his uncle to qualify for the Church. He was, however, rejected by the bishop, and his family, regarding him as a hopeless young man, supplied him with £38 and sent him to seek his fortune in America. The money had all gone before Oliver reached Cork, and, returning home, he was again started in life, this time for London, with £50. This money disappeared at a gaming-table in Dublin. Yet another effort was made to get the imprudent young man away from Ireland; and at last, in 1752, he reached Edinburgh and entered himself as a medical student.

After two years at Edinburgh, he drifted to the old Continental city of Leyden, and from there started on his vagabond "grand tour" through Flanders, Italy, Germany and France, his only provision for the journey being a guinea and a flute.

His skill in music stood him in good stead during his wanderings. "I had," he says, "some knowledge of music with a tolerable voice; I now turned what was once my amusement into a present means of subsistence. I passed among the harmless peasants of Flanders and among such of the French who were poor enough to be very merry; for I ever found them sprightly in proportion to their wants. Whenever I approached a peasant's house towards nightfall, I played one of my most merry tunes, and that procured me not only a lodging, but subsistence for the next day."

He returned to England in 1756, with only a few halfpence in his pocket, and, after trying many callings, became usher in a school at Peckham. Here a publisher named Griffiths found him, and supplied him with hack literary work at a miserable rate of payment.

In the hope of gaining literary fame, the usher resigned his post and joined the ranks of Grub Street authors. For years he struggled with extreme poverty. A garret in Green Arbour Court, Old Bailey, with a single wooden chair and bench, was his only lodging; his clothes were often so old and ragged he dared not be seen out in them by daylight, and his dinners, when there was money for dinner at all, consisted of the most meagre fare.

In the midst of this life of squalor the poor young author would find time to be kind to his still more miserable neighbours, and was long remembered lovingly for his flute-playing by the children and poor folk of the court.

But better days were in store for him. The publication, in 1759, of his *Enquiry into the State of Polite Learning in Europe* attracted the attention of several noted men, and soon orders came for other work.

He started a periodical called *The Bee*, and contributed essays to several magazines of the day. Among these writings were the *Chinese Letters*, which described a Chinaman's impressions of English life. These delightful essays were afterwards embodied in *The Citizen of the World*.

Better times brought better means, and, in 1762, Goldsmith

removed to a decent lodging off Fleet Street. Here Dr. Johnson found him out, extended a helping hand, and became a most valuable friend. And, indeed, our author needed a kind preceptor to take charge of him, for he was ever in debt, and more than once the good Doctor saved him from the debtor's prison.

His tender heart was worked upon by every case of misery that presented itself to him; he would empty his pockets to relieve suffering without any forethought for his own pressing needs. He also delighted in the vanity of new clothes, and would deck his ugly little person in the most gorgeous, unsuitable apparel, which he had never the money to pay for.

On one occasion, when arrested for debt, he sent in despair for Johnson. His good friend sent back a guinea by the messenger and promised to come himself.

On his arrival he found Goldsmith drinking a bottle of Madeira purchased with the guinea which should have gone to the creditor. A talk over the best way of getting out of his difficulties induced Goldsmith to show his friend the manuscript of a story he had written, *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

Johnson saw at once how good it was, and went off and sold it to a publisher for £60.

Thus Goldsmith was able to pay his debts and return to his habitual hopeful condition.

*The Vicar of Wakefield* was not published till 1766, and before that date its author had become famous through the publication of his poem *The Traveller*. Other works followed in quick succession. His first play, *The Goodnatured Man*, was produced in 1768; his best poem, *The Deserted Village*, in 1770; and his most delightful comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer*, in 1773.

*The Goodnatured Man* brought him £500, and he immediately launched forth in a set of chambers in the Middle Temple. He paid £400 for the rooms, and soon spent the remainder of his money in Wilton carpets, "blue moreen" covered sofas, mirrors, card tables, and bookcases. The maintenance of this establishment involved him deeper and

deeper in debt, and he was driven to undertake many literary tasks to pay off his creditors.

He had already written a *History of England* and a *History of Animated Nature*; these he now undertook to enlarge, and proposed writing a *History of Greece and Rome*, and other weighty volumes.

He never lived to complete these arduous labours. In 1774, he was seized with fever, which he aggravated by taking copious doses of a popular quack-medicine, James's powders.

He died in his chambers, and was buried in the burial-ground of the Temple Church. A monument was erected in Westminster Abbey, by Johnson's Club, to the memory of their old member.

His last literary effort was an unpublished poem, *Retaliation*, in which, with great cleverness, he gave rhymed sketches of his club friends. It was called forth by the epitaphs made by some members of the club, notably David Garrick, who had written of him—

“Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness call'd Noll,  
Who wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll.”

*The Deserted Village* is Goldsmith's chief poem. In Sweet Auburn he is doubtless thinking of his own early Irish home, of his first schoolmaster, and of his father, who is the village preacher of the poem.

His other poems include *The Traveller*, which records his own personal experiences as a wandering minstrel; a ballad, *Edwin and Angelina*; and a poetic farce, *The Haunch of Venison*.

But it is as a novelist and playwright that he chiefly shines.

*The Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Citizen of the World*, through their natural pathos and humour and simple yet perfect style, have become classics.

In *The Vicar of Wakefield* we tenderly follow the venerable and pathetic figure of the Rev. Doctor Primrose and his family through all the vicissitudes of their lives. From the country parsonage, surrounded by all the quiet pleasures of country



life, we go with them through their many troubles even to the miseries of Newgate. Each scene is most graphically and most sympathetically portrayed.

As dramatist, Goldsmith is renowned as a writer of good plays in an age of few playwrights.

*The Goodnatured Man* has still many admirers, and *She Stoops to Conquer* has held the stage ever since it was produced.

As an essayist, his charm of style is equally apparent; indeed, as Johnson once said of him, quoting an epigram of an illustrious Frenchman, Fénelon, "He touched nothing which he did not adorn."

### THE FIRST NOVELISTS

**Samuel Richardson** (1689-1761).—At a village school in Derbyshire, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, there was a good and sober-minded boy, named Samuel Richardson, the son of a joiner, who entertained his schoolmates with many stories, and gained a wonderful reputation as a beautiful letter-writer. Indeed, letter-writing was with him a passion, and especially did he excel in writing love letters for the girls in the neighbourhood, who made him their confidant in their love affairs, and came to him for comfort and sympathy in all their joys and sorrows.

In this way Richardson had learnt a great deal about women before he left school, in his sixteenth year, to be apprenticed to a London printer.

He was a model apprentice, served his master faithfully for seven years, then set up business for himself with his master's daughter for wife. He had a long and prosperous career, first in Fleet Street, afterwards in Salisbury Court, was elected master of the Stationer's Company and appointed printer to the House of Commons. In his hours of leisure, the industrious printer indulged in his favourite occupation of letter-writing, and occasionally wrote prefaces and compiled indexes for the books he was entrusted to print.

Then, in 1740, when he was fifty years of age, came the suggestion from a bookseller that he should write a series of familiar letters on common subjects, which should be published to serve as models to people who were not able to indite letters themselves. Richardson eagerly undertook the task, and, thinking it would be more interesting to put them into the form of a story, "accidently slid," as he said, "into the writing of *Pamela*"—our first novel.

For his story he chose the history of a simple but beautiful country girl, who goes out to service, and, after passing through many trials and resisting many temptations, is ultimately married to her rich master. This is all told in the form of letters which Pamela writes to her mother. Rather tedious reading they are to-day, but, in an age which had never read any story which centred itself in everyday life, *Pamela* was considered a wonderful book. Everyone read it, clergymen praised it in their sermons, society ladies wept over its pages; it travelled into the remotest country villages; and, when at last the final chapters, recording the marriage of the heroine, were published, many a village church bell was set ringing.

From that time on, to the close of his life, Richardson was a celebrity. In his "country box," The Grange, Fulham, he was surrounded by a choice circle of female admirers, who poured their sweet adulations into his ears or listened with rapt attention to some chapter of a new work from his pen.

The publication, in serial parts, of his masterpiece, *Clarissa*, in 1748, raised the top stone of his fame. The sorrows and adventures of the lovely Clarissa, her escape from her cruel family to a persecuting and vicious lover, stirred the whole country to a flame of excitement. Ladies wrote to Richardson from all parts imploring him to give dear Clarissa a happy ending. One lady, who assured him she had shed a pint of tears over the story, threatened him with heartrending curses if he dared make Clarissa and Lovelace (her lover) end unhappily.

In spite of all these protestations, Richardson carried his

novel to its naturally sad close. It remains to-day, in spite of much wearisome detail, a great prose tragedy. Having succeeded so admirably in drawing the character of an ideal woman, Richardson next tried to portray a perfect man in *Sir Charles Grandison*, published in 1753.

This novel is not nearly so good as its predecessors. Sir Charles is a ceremonious and pompous young man, who, as a great French critic, M. Taine, justly said, "should be stuffed and canonised for his wearisome good qualities."

After this book was completed, Richardson was content to rest on his laurels. The last years of his life were spent in retirement in his villa at Parson's Green, amid "the flower garden of ladies" he loved to gather around him. Here, in his favourite arbour, we can imagine him, as he was represented by an artist of the day, a plump little man with a fresh complexion, double chin, grey eyes and a mild placid expression sitting methodically at his work, with his ink-horn fixed in the right arm of his chair, and dressed in a huge flaxen wig, knee breeches, and claret-coloured coat.

Richardson shares with Fielding the honoured title of "Father of the English Novel." They were great rivals in life, and Richardson could never be brought to see anything to admire in the work of his adversary. They differed greatly in character and their methods of writing, but had one great trait in common—they both wrote real stories of everyday life.

Fielding had more learning, elegance and wit than the author of *Clarissa*, but to Richardson belong the distinctive qualifications of an unrivalled knowledge of women and a vivid imagination, which enabled him to relate the commonplace reflections and doings of very ordinary people in a graceful yet truthful manner appealing straight to the hearts of his reader.

He is justly styled the "Father of the Novel of Sentiment."

**Henry Fielding** (1707-1754).—Although Fielding shares with Richardson the honour of creating the English novel, his work only resembles his rival's in its main impulse. Like

Richardson, Fielding set out to copy human nature faithfully and in detail; but, in his experiences of life, in his whole temperament and character, he differed so widely from the sober and sentimental little printer, that he has given us in his immortal novels vastly different work.

Henry Fielding was the son of a general, and was born at Sharpham Park, Glastonbury. He was educated at Eton and Leyden University.

Possessed of a ready wit and a taste for dissipation, but very little money, he came up to London, and commenced his literary career by writing comedies and burlesques.

All his dramatic work was written, to supply the needs of the hour, carelessly and hastily. His comedies were for the most part adaptations of the great French playwright, Molière. His best farces were *The Author's Farce* and *Tom Thumb*.

About 1730, he married a very beautiful lady, Miss Charlotte Cradock, of Salisbury, who had a small fortune. This was dissipated by Fielding during the few months of country life which followed his marriage, and he was compelled to come to London again to work for himself and his wife.

For a short time he was proprietor of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, where he produced two successful burlesques.

They contained libellous attacks on the ministry, and were suppressed by the passing of an Act which compelled an author to get the consent of the Lord Chamberlain before presenting his plays to an audience.

Fielding next entered the Middle Temple to study for the bar, supporting his family by writing political articles and essays, and editing newspapers.

The chorus of praise which greeted the publication of *Pamela*, in 1740, was not echoed by the young barrister, whose keen sense of humour revealed to him the ridiculous side of Richardson's sentimental heroine. He resolved to parody this popular novel by transferring the leading incidents of Pamela's career to a male character, whom he called Joseph Andrews.



As the book grew, however, Fielding disregarded his original intention, and produced a complete novel of life and manners, with a group of characters of which one at least, Parson Adams, is immortal.

*Joseph Andrews*, published 1742, was followed by three volumes of *Miscellanies* in 1743.

The *Miscellanies* contained, besides a play and some essays and verse, a clever study in fiction, *The History of Jonathan Wild*. Both were successful, but their author remained in constant money troubles owing chiefly to his extravagances.

His much-loved wife, worn out by worry and trouble, died in 1745, leaving him broken-hearted. The rest of his life was a long struggle with ill-health, the result of early dissipation and hard work.

In 1749, appeared his masterpiece, *Tom Jones*, for which he received £700. His last novel, *Amelia*, was published three years later. He continued to perform his duties as magistrate for Westminster and to do journalistic work till 1754, when, very ill with a complication of diseases, he took a fond farewell of his children and quitted England for a voyage to Lisbon, in the hope of regaining his health.

The change was, however, of no use; he died at Lisbon two months after his arrival. His end was a sad close to a short and brilliant career. In spite of his early drunkenness and imprudence, for which he dearly paid in after sickness, Fielding possessed many noble traits of character. He was very kind-hearted, and always ready to help those in distress; he had an honest, manly nature, and was a tender-hearted, loving father.

His last work, *Journal of the Voyage to Lisbon*, published after his death, is a touching example of his manly cheerfulness and kind thought for others, even when he was so ill himself.

Fielding lives to-day as a great name in literature in his four novels, *Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*.

Of these, *Tom Jones* is his most famous work. It has been

considered by some critics to be the greatest novel ever published. The characters are well drawn and natural, the story well constructed, and told in a pleasant, genial and witty manner. It is marred by the coarseness of the hero, whose practical jokes and scapegrace enterprises are detestable.

**Tobias Smollett** (1721-1771) wrote histories, satires, essays and poetry, but is only remembered to-day as a novelist.

He was grandson to Sir James Smollett, a Scotchman of high renown, and was born at Dalquhurn, in Dumbartonshire.

His father died soon after his birth, but, through the care of his mother and grandfather, he was carefully educated at Dumbarton Grammar School, whence he went to Glasgow to study medicine. In 1739, he came up to London and endeavoured to get his first literary offspring—a tragedy—put on the stage.

Failing in this, partly, it is said, through his bad temper, he obtained a post as surgeon's mate on board a man-of-war, and left England in Admiral Vernon's fleet on a disastrous expedition against Carthage.

Whilst in the West Indies with the fleet, he left the naval service and spent some time in Jamaica, where he met an heiress, Miss Lascelles, who later became his wife.

In 1744, he started practising in London as a physician, but met with little success. He was keenly sensitive to criticism, ever quarrelling with his friends and making them the bulls for his satires, and was in every way unsuited for the life of a medical man.

In literature he did much better, for the publication of his first novel, *Roderick Random* (1748), was an instant success. It was a coarse but vigorous story of his own adventures at sea. His love of satire led him to caricature his good old grandfather in the book. His second novel, *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), is marred by similar faults, but is in many ways a good story worthy of the popularity it at once attained.

Smollett made one more effort to set up as a medical man, this time at Bath; but, like his previous enterprises, this was also a failure.

Returning to London, he settled in Chelsea, published the *Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom*, and threw himself into journalism as a means of livelihood.

His last novel, *Humphrey Clinker*, was written on his death-bed, at Mount Novo, near Leghorn, in Italy. He died shortly after its publication, in 1771, and was buried at Leghorn.

A stately column was erected to his memory in Scotland, near his birthplace. On it is inscribed a long Latin inscription, revised by Dr. Johnson, who, with characteristic decision, declared that it would be a disgrace to Dr. Smollett to put it in English. "His admirers," he declared, "would be equal to Latin, and the inscription was not intended for Highland drovers."

Smollett's work is characterised by great spirit and variety. He had not the inventive genius of either Richardson or Fielding, neither had he their power of constructing a story. His books are merely stories of personal adventure, told with much wit and frolic, though always in a coarse, unpleasing manner. *Humphrey Clinker*, his greatest work, is in the form of letters, supposed to be written by different members of a squire's family travelling about England and Scotland. Many of them are delightful reading, and give us capital sketches of eighteenth-century life.

**Laurence Sterne** (1713-1768).—A great contrast to the coarse, strong humour of Smollett is the dainty wit and exquisite style of Laurence Sterne. Born at Clonmel, in Ireland, and son of an officer, his early life was spent in travelling with his father's regiment. When eleven years of age he was sent to Halifax Grammar School, where he remained for over seven years. His father died in 1731, and, a year later, with the assistance of a cousin, Simon Sterne, young Laurence was sent to Cambridge. Here he graduated and took Holy Orders. Through the patronage of an uncle, who was Archdeacon of York, Laurence was appointed to the living of Sutton-in-the-Forest and made a prebendary of York.

In 1759, at York, and a year later in London, he published

the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. This work was an instantaneous success, and was followed by a volume of sermons and four more volumes of his novel. The fame of *Tristram Shandy* travelled to France, and when, in 1762, Sterne visited Paris he was received with much honour. Three years later two more volumes of *Tristram* appeared and a second series of sermons. A tour through France and Italy, taken later for the benefit of his health, supplied the material for his last delightful book, *The Sentimental Journey*.

Working away at his Yorkshire vicarage after his return, Sterne finished, in 1767, the last volume of *Tristram Shandy*, and prepared for the press the first two volumes of *The Sentimental Journey*. These he brought to London for publication in the beginning of 1768. They appeared in February of that year, and, a month later, their author, who had been suffering from a complication of diseases, died in a London lodging.

Sterne owes his place in literature to the exquisite humour, the delicate pathos and the delightful style of his two novels, *Tristram Shandy* and *The Sentimental Journey*. Novels in the ordinary sense they scarcely are—we might almost call them inclinations to a story with innumerable digressions. We are led through a labyrinth of fantastic and sentimental stories, all told with whimsical humour. Sterne prided himself on the fact that the reader should never discover what was coming next.

Among the characters portrayed in *Tristram Shandy* Mr. and Mrs. Shandy, Corporal Trim and Yorick are all imperishable types, but the truthful and tenderly humorous Uncle Toby is his masterpiece.

**David Hume** (1711–1776), philosopher and historian, was born at Edinburgh. He was educated for the profession of the law, but his love for philosophy and history drove him from his law books. After a short sojourn in a commercial house at Bristol, whither his father had sent him in the hope of his becoming a merchant, he gave up commerce, crossed to France, and gave himself up to a life of study. He was



by nature very despondent, and sought a solace from his sufferings in a solitary dreamland of books.

In 1739, he published his first treatise *On Human Nature*. The work was little noticed at the time, although it marked the commencement of a new era in philosophy. It was followed by *Essays Moral and Political*, in 1741. As neither of these works brought their author any profit, Hume was compelled to find employment which would enable him to live in independence. He accepted the post of guardian and travelling companion to an insane gentleman, but afterwards gave up this ungenial work to become secretary to General St. Clair, with whom he travelled in France, Holland, Germany and Italy.

In 1751, appeared his *Inquiry into the Principles of Morals*, a work of great originality, and the foundation of what is termed the utilitarian system of philosophy. In this work he maintains that all virtue is based on utility.

His *Political Discoveries*, (1752) mark an era in political economy. One of his most important tenets was the doctrine of free trade. He had by this time returned to Scotland, and, holding the post of Keeper of the Lord Advocate's Library, Edinburgh, was able to enjoy the immense store of books placed under his care. Here it was that he conceived the idea of writing a *History of England*.

The first volume, describing the reigns of James I. and Charles I., appeared in 1754, and caused a great deal of discussion; the two volumes, published later, which brought his History down to the Revolution were a complete success.

He completed his work, in 1762, by taking his History back to the Roman period. A year later he was in France again, the honoured guest of the wits and savants of Paris. He held important posts under the English Government in the French capital, and returned to England, in 1769, "very opulent," he says, "(for I possessed a revenue of £1,000 a year), healthy, and though somewhat stricken in years, with the prospect of enjoying long my ease, and of seeing the increase of my reputation."

He spent seven years in the city of his birth, and died there in 1776.

Hume's philosophic work need not detain us here. His literary fame rests on his History. He was regarded by his contemporaries as the greatest of modern historians. The patient research of writers since his time has proved that he was often wrong in his facts and prejudiced in his judgments; but his lucid, beautiful English and his wonderful power of setting forth his story in picturesque array make him for all time a great figure in literature.

**Edward Gibbon** (1737-1794).—"Whatever else is read, Gibbon must be read too," a noted writer, Mr. Freeman, has declared; and truly Gibbon's noble work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, holds a unique place in every English library.

Our historian was born at Putney, as he tells us in his autobiography, and was the eldest son and sole survivor of seven children.

He was a delicate boy, and received his early education from his aunt, whose devotion to him he repaid in after life by constant affection.

After much desultory reading, and two years of school-life at Westminster, his father sent him to Oxford. He entered college, he tells us, "with a stock of erudition which might have puzzled a doctor, and a degree of ignorance of which a schoolboy might have been ashamed."

At the University, he spent fourteen months, "the most idle and unprofitable of my whole life," and was converted to Roman Catholicism.

To reconvert him to the Protestant faith his father sent him to the home of a Calvinist minister at Lausanne. Here, he tells us, "the various articles of the Romish creed disappeared like a dream," and he made up for lost time at the University by arduous study of French literature and the Latin classics.

During the five years he spent at Lausanne he made his first essay in writing, in a little French treatise, *Essaie sur l'Etude de la Literature*.

Returning to England, in 1758, Gibbon was for some time Captain in the Hampshire Militia. Whilst performing his military duties, he was considering plans for a long historical work. A visit to Rome, in 1764, decided his subject. "It was as I sat musing," he tells us, "amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started into my mind."

The work was not, however, commenced till five years later. The death of his father, in 1770, gave Gibbon much work to do in setting his estate in order. This accomplished, he settled in London, and entered Parliament as member for Liskeard. Meantime his great History was slowly progressing, and, in 1776, the first volume, the result of seven years' patient and exhausting work, was published. Its success was immediate, its author was at once hailed as a great philosophical historian, though he had to bear the attacks of many ecclesiastics who saw in his work an unjust estimate of the early Christians.

Gibbon took little notice of his assailants; he steadily persevered in his self-imposed task, and, after publishing two more volumes in London, retired to Lausanne, in 1783, to the home of a great friend named Deyverdun. Here he spent the next four years of his life, surrounded by an immense library of 6,000 volumes, working happily away at his book. The sixth and last volume was completed in 1787.

"It was on the day, or rather the night of the 27th June, 1787," writes Gibbon, "between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last lines of the last page in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen I took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and, perhaps,

the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that whatsoever might be the future fate of my History, the life of the historian must be short and precarious."

The last years of our author's life were saddened by the death of his companion, Deyverdun, and by the troublous times of the French Revolution, which drove his old and valued friends the Neckers into exile. His health was also broken by good living and want of exercise.

He died in London from dropsy.

Gibbon's life work, the "encyclopædic history," is the noblest historical work in the English language.

It is a magnificent record of ancient history, extending over 1,000 years. Rome is taken as the centre of the world, and her history told, with that of all the Pagan nations who wrought her ruin. It was an enormous subject, but Gibbon concentrated his splendid intellect upon it so ably that, amid the multitude of bewildering detail which beset him on every side, he never once lost the unity of his scheme. Every detail is mastered and arranged in order. The ages which preceded the rise of modern Europe had been veritable dark ages till he attacked, with undaunted courage, the closed citadel, and revealed to all Europe the picture of a great and glorious nation's decay and death. He paints in the most vivid colours the great panorama of these centuries. We have magnificent descriptions of battles, sieges and ancient pageants; we learn the customs and manners of many peoples, their progress in art, their science of war, their systems of government and the geography of their lands. Only one thing is lacking; Gibbon possessed the hard, sceptical and unemotional intellect of the age, and was unable to do justice to the heroism of Christian martyrs or the moral beauty of Christianity. His style is more grandiose and pompous than we are accustomed to admire at the present day, but if the pomp and richness of his



manner is scarcely suited to the lighter portions of his narrative, his stateliness and wonderful descriptive power are admirable, and have never been equalled by any other historian.

**Edmund Burke** (1729-1797), a celebrated orator and one of our greatest political writers, was born at Dublin.

His father was a lawyer, and wished his son to train for the bar. After graduating at Trinity College, Dublin, young Burke came to London, in 1750, to keep his terms at the Middle Temple. Legal studies were not, however, much to his taste, and soon the promising career of a barrister was changed for the more exciting attractions of literary and political life. From 1750 to 1760 he was engaged chiefly in writing. His first important publication was a *Vindication of Natural Society*, (1756), in which he imitated the style and ridiculed the reasoning of Lord Bolingbroke. It was followed by his celebrated essay, *An Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.

He married, in the same year, the daughter of Dr. Nugent of Bath—a marriage of great happiness, though the young couple were in constant pecuniary difficulties. Working hard for fame in politics as well as literature, Burke gradually fought his way into political life, and, in 1761, received the appointment of private secretary to "Single Speech" Hamilton, who was then Chief Secretary for Ireland. The narrow circle of Dublin life Burke left, two years later, to return to London to make his first essay in practical politics as M.P. for Wendover, and to act as private secretary to Lord Rockingham, the Whig Prime Minister. It was also about this time that he joined Dr. Johnson's famous Literary Club.

In the House of Commons he soon won a foremost place. He was strongly opposed to the Tory enactments which led to the American War of Independence, and spoke and wrote with great eloquence on the great political question of the hour. Among the most noted of his published speeches and pamphlets at the time are *Observations on the Present State of*

*the Nation, Causes of the Present Discontent, American Taxation, and Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol.*

He held important offices in Whig Governments, and for some time represented Bristol in Parliament. The summit of his fame as an orator was reached at the trial of Warren Hastings, 1788, when his great speech against Hastings worked his audience to a high pitch of excitement. During the latter part of his life Burke was deeply absorbed in studying and writing about the French Revolution. He was a lover of liberty, but a still greater lover of order, and could view the overthrow of the French monarchy and the anarchy which ensued with nothing but horror.

His *Reflections on the French Revolution*, (1790), had much influence in Europe. In *Thoughts on French Affairs*, he continued his vigorous attacks on the Revolution; and, in *Letters on a Regicide's Peace*, was so carried away by his passions that he not only urged the English Government to fight against the revolutionists, but declared that free opinions must be suppressed at home.

Burke's last years, spent in retirement on his estate near Beaconsfield, were clouded by the death of his only son, whom he had hoped to see succeed to his place in the world of politics.

One of his last treatises, *Letter to a Noble Lord*, a vigorous and powerful address, was called forth by certain ungenerous comments made on the well-earned pension which had been granted him. He died at Beaconsfield, and was buried by the side of his much-loved son in the graveyard of its country church.

Burke will ever hold a high place in the eighteenth-century literature. He was a man of vast knowledge, high moral principles and a glowing imagination, and was also possessed of the most wonderful powers of expression.

## X.

# THE AGE OF ROMANTIC LITERATURE

(1790-1837)

THE closing years of the eighteenth century and the opening decades of the nineteenth include a period of complete change in English literature. The stalwart army of artificial poets and ponderous prose writers, who had held literature captive for so long, was entirely overthrown by a band of great imaginative authors.

It is true that the ranks of the old army had already been broken by a few poets and novelists, who had drawn their inspirations from nature and from the real lives of men and women, and had dared express themselves with some display of passionate feeling. But these early innovators had not ventured to speak out; they appear to have been half ashamed of their emotions.

The writers considered in the present chapter, however, were quite free from eighteenth-century restrictions. They lived in different times, and came under vastly different influences from those which surrounded the artificial classical authors.

**Political Events which Influenced Literature.** — The political history of these years unfolds a tale of revolution, of wars and internal conflicts, that shook the nations of the civilised world to their very foundations, and brought forth a passionate display of feeling, often unrestrained and far-reaching in its consequences.

The Frenchman, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and other eighteenth-century writers had sown the seeds of a great revolutionary tree, in their teaching that all men were equal, that all had the right to be free and that all were bound together, regardless of nationality, in a universal brotherhood.

This doctrine of freedom, equality and fraternity became an active power in Europe at the French Revolution, when the French nation overthrew a constitution under which a powerful court and nobility had enjoyed every luxury and a poor down-trodden peasantry had dwelt in misery and despair.

The influence of this great political event was strong in England. Men of all ages and classes, but more especially the young men of the day, championed the cause of liberty, and some among them found vent for their feelings in literature.

After events, the excesses of the revolutionists and the terrible wars with Napoleon, in which England was involved in a struggle almost for existence, turned many lovers of liberty into ardent enemies of unlicensed freedom; yet not a single writer of the age could entirely escape being influenced in some way by the extraordinary events of his time.

The trials and triumphs through which our nation passed roused English patriotism to an enthusiasm which reminds one of the old Elizabethan days. Heroes like Nelson, military geniuses like Wellington, triumphed over formidable enemies; and earnest enterprising Englishmen worked long and patiently, in far-distant corners of the globe, laying the foundations of many an English colony and of our great Indian Empire.

Travelling became general, and enterprise and commerce with far-distant lands vastly increased, bringing in their train a better knowledge of foreign countries and broader views on many subjects.

**Steam Printing Machinery Invented.**—The invention of printing by steam had also enormous influence on literary productions.



The old hand printing-press, in spite of many improvements made since the days of Caxton, necessitated a great amount of labour, and even then could only produce a hundred or two of the sheets of a newspaper in an hour.

The steam machinery, invented by a German named König, brought about an entire revolution in the printing world.

The *Times* was the first newspaper in any country to profit by the invention. The work of setting up the new press was accomplished in 1814, when, by König's machinery, it was found possible to produce 1,800 sheets of the *Times* in an hour. Vast improvements on this first printing-press driven by steam power have been made since 1814. Invention has followed invention in rapid succession, till at the present time newspapers are thrown off at the rate of many thousands an hour, and books, printed in hundreds of thousands, are sold so cheaply that they find their way into the poorest homes.

With all these influences at work we are not surprised to find a great revival in literature. Authors had new impulses to write, fresh themes to unfold and a far larger public to enjoy their work. Thus inspired, they cast away the artificial cloak which had covered literature for so long and embarked on a new era, which, for want of a better word, is called the Romantic.

The word "Romantic" must, however, be taken in a much broader sense than that in which we have hitherto used it.

Nature, and man as he harmonises with Nature, were the chief themes of the Romantic writers of this era. They produced original imaginative work, not in any respect imitative, and therefore we find great variety in subject and treatment.

We may have peaceful country scenes and peasant folk described in simple language, yet excelling in lofty and profound reflection. We may be carried back to mediæval times by narratives in verse and prose steeped in tradition and full of life and vigour. We may be led from this more characteristically English work to wider realms, in which an intense

feeling for beauty gains inspiration in Greek myth and poetry, and a strong admiration for unlicensed liberty finds its outlet in stories of adventure, or in satires on morality when this morality appears to be hypocritical.

Over verse and over prose Romanticism exercised equal sway; all is touched with the light of vivid imagination and the love of truth; but in poetry the firstfruits of the new movement were gathered.

**Poetry.**—Although the work of drawing man back to Nature had already commenced, the outburst of splendid natural poetry which ushered in the nineteenth century is in many ways remarkable. In the publication of that volume of old English ballads, Percy's *Reliques*; in the curious imitations of mediæval Romances, which had caused such a stir in the eighteenth century; and in the work of a few solitary poets, a new order of poetry had been predicted; but the ordinary reader was still faithful to Pope, and quite unprepared for a revolution in verse.

When William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge, in 1798, gave to the world a volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, quite unlike anything that it was then fashionable to read and praise, a stream of ridicule was poured upon their work by the leading writers of the day.

But the laughter and disdain of their critics could not daunt the two young poets; they went on working in their quiet mountain home, each pursuing in his own individual way, and without reference to public taste, the path of truth.

Wordsworth sought to make men love the mountain, the brook, the birds, the flowers and the trees, which to him were the most beautiful embodiments of life; and from these scenes, far removed from the artificial life of the town, he drew the simple country folk we meet so often in his poems.

Coleridge painted, with the same intense feeling, the beauties of landscape; he carried his readers into a strange, fantastic dreamland, in which the marvels of fairy-lore were set forth in a natural manner. He is seen at his best in *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*.

Both poets were, as Wordsworth said, prophets of Nature, and they did not preach to a heedless generation. Gradually a band of young men, among whom Robert Southey is most renowned, gathered around them; and the new poetry became a power in the land.

The critics at length recognised that the "Lake poets," as they were called, because their chief haunts were the secluded lake districts of Westmoreland, were men of genius.

The second group of poets who grace these years centres around the magic name of Sir Walter Scott, who with the publication of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, in 1805, burst into fame.

His delightful verse-narratives found a ready public among a multitude of people who had never before read poetry.

*Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake* and *The Lord of the Isles* completed his popularity. He was the "whole world's darling," and, although more honoured to-day as novelist than as poet, still holds an important place among the romantic poets.

Thomas Campbell, another Scottish poet, also possessed a remarkable gift for poetical narrative, especially seen in his battle songs, *Ye Mariners of England*, *Battle of the Baltic* and *Hohenlinden*; and Thomas Moore, the Irish lyrical poet, was as great a favourite with the public as Scott and Campbell. His beautiful lyrics have given him a lasting popularity, though much of his other work has passed from the world of letters.

Three great poets, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats, who are sometimes grouped together under the title of the "Shelley group," mark the highest development of Romanticism in poetry.

The early Romantics joined but slightly in the cry for liberty which had been raised in Europe. They were conservative, and believed absolutely in the rule of law and order.

In Lord Byron, whose poetry was very popular in England between 1816-1820, the spirit of the Revolution had full sway. He made war against convention in morality, religion,

and politics. Passion without restraint, imagination, wit, pathos and satire are the characteristics of his verse. In *Childe Harold*, in *Don Juan*, in *Beppo*, in *The Vision of Judgment* he is seen as the most extreme of revolutionary poets as well as a most brilliant satirist. He was a versatile genius, his work not English, but European, for his fame in foreign lands has exceeded his reputation in his own country.

Shelley possessed all the revolutionary ardour of Byron, but his verse is more spiritual. His intense feeling for beauty in nature, his powerful imagination and his thrilling melody are seen in every line of his long poems, *The Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound*, and in his exquisite lyrics of nature, which include the immortal *Ode to the West Wind*.

Keats, like Shelley, worshipped beauty. Throughout his short span of life he pursued, as he himself said, "the principle of beauty in all things." *Endymion*, *Hyperion*, and *Lamia* are his long poems. The two great odes, *To a Nightingale* and *On a Grecian Urn*, are his chief contributions to lyric verse.

All three poets of the Shelley group found poetic inspiration in the sunny South. All three, though in different forms, were influenced by Greek art and literature, and were touched with the spirit of the early Italian poet, Dante.

**Minor Poets.**—Of the lesser poets George Crabbe, whom we have already noticed in the preceding chapter, published his last poem, *The Borough*, in 1810. Walter Savage Landor produced polished verse in *Gebir*. Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt, though more renowned as prose writers, were among the Romantics in poetry; and they have been linked with Keats under the title of "Cockney poets." Thomas Love Peacock retained the spirit of the Johnsonian age in his best-known poem, *Rhododaphne*, as also did the renowned wit Samuel Rogers in his very prosaic poems, *The Pleasures of Memory*, (1786), and *Italy*, (1822).

Imitators of Byron, Shelley, and Keats there were in great profusion. To the illustrated annuals, which delighted our great-grandmothers, many pleasant versifiers contributed pathetic or humorous verse. But little of their work has



achieved lasting fame. T. L. Beddoes, a dramatist and lyric poet, is the most important of the immediate followers of Shelley; and Thomas Hood, the droll, jocular poet of the people, is remembered for his truly pathetic *Song of the Shirt* and a host of merry songs.

Among the **Prose** writers of this age we place first the novelists, essayists, and critics; but every branch of writing had able exponents.

**Novels.**—The early years of our period saw the production of two kinds of novels—the novel of terror and the novel of manners.

The chief exponent of the novel of terror was Mrs. Radcliff, whose bogey stories of the adventures of romantic heroines in haunted chambers and echoing vaults found many readers.

The novel of manners was brought to great perfection by Maria Edgeworth, whose tales of Irish life are our first examples of a kind of novel dealing with the characteristics and peculiarities of a nation. Miss Edgeworth's keen anxiety to point a moral in her stories may, perhaps, be one of the reasons why she is now so little read; but her Irish stories, rich in humour, pathos and tenderness, are well worth perusal.

William Godwin, who unfolded his political views in the form of a novel, is a representative revolutionary novelist.

Other writers who enjoyed a reputation in the earlier portion of our period were Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Opie, Lady Morgan, and Miss Mitford. But the one woman whose novels have increased in popularity as the nineteenth century has advanced and come to a close is Jane Austen. Miss Austen scorned ghost stories and romantic adventures of every kind. She drew her tales from the lives of commonplace people living in an everyday world. The great charm of her work is her artistic and absolutely truthful treatment of her subjects. *Pride and Prejudice* (written in 1797), *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Mansfield Park* are perfect literary works of their kind, and have placed their author in the foremost ranks of English novelists.

By the side of Jane Austen stands a vastly different genius. In Sir Walter Scott we have the king of the romantic novel. The pure spirit of romance, the delight of landscape painting and the passion for the picturesque are all seen in their greatest perfection in his twenty-nine novels.

His masterpieces of Scottish life commenced with *Waverley*, (1814), his series of novels dealing with England in the Middle Ages with *Ivanhoe*, (1820), and his stories of Continental life with *Quentin Durward*, (1823).

His influence on English novel-writing, and, indeed, on novel-writing throughout Europe, was enormous. In France he may be said to have created the school of romance which brought forth Dumas and Victor Hugo, and in Germany he gained the admiration of the great literary genius Goethe.

Among the minor novelists contemporary with Scott, Miss Ferrier wrote humorous tales of Scottish manners of some merit, and Thomas Love Peacock, remaining faithful to eighteenth-century form, contributed the witty stories of *Headley Hall* and *Nightmare Abbey*.

Two elegant, fashionable writers, Edward Lytton Bulwer and Benjamin Disraeli (the last of whom became so important a political figure in Queen Victoria's reign), mark the influence of Lord Byron on prose writers. Both novelists belonged to the company of dandies who sought a road to political life through novel-writing. Both delighted to write about wicked people of high birth, and dressed their stories with extravagant conceits.

Lord Lytton, whose *Falkland*, (1827), was the first of his long series of novels, was a versatile writer; though his tales are somewhat mawkish in sentiment, his people unreal and too fond of using fine words.

Disraeli, who published his first novel, *Vivian Grey*, in 1826, possessed a rare wit, but is florid, and sometimes incoherent in style.

**Critics and Essayists.**—One of the most interesting developments in prose literature was the literary magazine, in which the works of contemporary authors were discussed,

not always fairly, but with far more literary skill than had ever been shown before.

The publication of the first of these magazines, *The Edinburgh Review*, in 1802, is a landmark in English literature. Its first editor, Francis Jeffrey, was a Whig in politics, and at first a slashing opponent of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

*The Quarterly* was started by the Tories in London, in opposition to *The Edinburgh*, in 1809, and was soon followed by *Blackwood's Magazine* and *The London Magazine*.

These papers were all of high literary merit, and, although at first opposed to the new school of poetry, ultimately gave just and sympathetic criticisms, in which the author's merits were considered without prejudices in favour of any particular style.

Charles Lamb, Coleridge, William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, De Quincey, John Wilson, Southey, Wordsworth, and Shelley are names associated with this new order of criticism.

Lamb, the most loved of them all, was one of the earliest critics to show a keen, sympathetic appreciation of the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge which the editor of *The Edinburgh* had called "babyish."

Besides his magazine work, some of the best of which is seen in the charming *Essays of Elia and Eliana*, Lamb's *Specimens of the Elizabethan Poets*, which included his own clever criticisms of their poetry, had great influence with his contemporaries, and is still a valued volume in our libraries.

Hazlitt wrote on a multitude of subjects, but did his chief critical work in his Lectures on *The English Poets*, *The Comic Writers*, and *The Dramatic Literature of Queen Elizabeth*; and Coleridge contributed very important essays on criticism in his *Biographia Literaria*.

Of other miscellaneous writers De Quincey is remembered to-day for his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*; Savage Landor has gained a unique place in literature by his *Imaginary Conversations*; and Sidney Smith, a renowned wit, is still admired in his *Letters of Peter Plymley*.

Thomas Carlyle, whose star of fame did not rise during these years, translated *Wilhelm Meister*, and contributed important essays to *The Edinburgh*; and Macaulay in 1825 found eager readers for his essay on Milton, published in the same magazine.

The most interesting examples of **Biography** are Southey's *Life of Nelson*, MacCrie's *Life of Knox*, Moore's *Life of Byron*, and Lockhart's *Life of Scott*.

**Travel.**—Books of travel and geographical discovery, far too numerous even to name here, have appeared in one long, continuous stream from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Travellers innumerable, with scientific, missionary or pleasurable aims, have set down their experiences in book form. Among the most noteworthy of the explorers of the early part of the century are Mungo Park, whose arduous labours were confined to Africa; Parry and Franklin, memorable explorers of the Polar regions; and Barrow, who spent long years in China.

In **History** three writers of renown marked the years which elapsed between the death of Gibbon and the historians of our own day. They are William Mitford, who wrote a *History of Greece*; John Lingard, famous for his *History of England*; and Henry Hallam, who produced two great works in his *View of the Middle Ages*, (1818), and his *Constitutional History of England*, (1827).

All three historians strove after truth in their work, seeking to substantiate their statements by careful inquiry and research among ancient documents. Hallam is by far the greatest of the three. His solid knowledge and well-balanced mind enabled him to present history, for the first time, without political or religious prejudices.

Sir W. Napier's *History of the Peninsular War* is a masterpiece of modern military history, and James Mill's *History of British India* is a work of much literary merit.

**Politics and Philosophy.**—The eloquent and powerful attacks of Burke (referred to in the preceding chapter) on the



new ideas of individual liberty, as seen in the French Revolution, brought several champions of liberty into the arena of political life.

Paine's *Rights of Man*, Godwin's *Political Justice* and Mackintosh's *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* were the most noteworthy productions of the defenders of the French Revolution.

But far more important work in the world of political philosophy came from the pen of Jeremy Bentham. His chief book, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, had immense influence in Europe. The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the keynote of his teaching. In jurisprudence he likewise did important work; we owe to him many a reform in our laws. Coleridge must also be remembered in connection with social and political philosophy; he was the first English writer to interpret German thought.

To the science of **Political Economy** James Mill, David Ricardo and Malthus contributed important works.

In **Theology**, William Paley's treatise, *Evidences of Christianity*, is an example of able theological argument; and the sermons of Robert Hall and Dr. Chalmers are noteworthy.

Coleridge, in his *Aids to Reflection*, placed the spiritual truths of religion above the evidence of miracles and the purely material arguments which had absorbed the attention of eighteenth-century theologians.

**Drama.**—The drama is the only branch of literature in which the Romantics failed.

We have two kinds of plays produced during these years—plays that are not literature, and literary productions which are not dramatic in the true sense of the word.

In the first-named class, Joanna Baillie and Sheridan Knowles captured the theatre-going public; in the last-named, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Landor have found many readers for their poetic dramas, but few theatrical managers adventurous enough to put them on the stage.

But, apart from the drama, the work of the Romantics in literature was great and enduring. Vivid imagination was their crowning glory. In Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and

Coleridge it is shown in the loneliness of the mountain ; in the darkness and gloom of winding, mossy ways ; or in the simple aspects of man, as seen in the patriot, the peasant and the child. In Scott and Byron it is seen in the romance of the past and in a broader, more universal appreciation of humanity.

By the year 1830 the work of the Romantics was complete ; they had brought the world back to Nature.

The years which immediately preceded the Victorian Age were not, however, devoid of interest. Young writers of genius, inspired by the great productions of the Romantics, but not purely imitative, were arising in poetry and prose. Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle and Macaulay were already embarked on a literary career, and, as we shall see in our closing chapter, the later decades of the nineteenth century have produced an enormous flood of original work.

## POETS

**William Wordsworth** (1770-1850), the first in point of time of the Romantic poets, may be said to have opened a new world of Nature and of Man to lovers of poetry.

Born at Cockermouth, on the blue Derwent, he lived from his earliest years in the awe-inspiring district of the English lakes. The mountains, the river, the trees, the flowers of his native county took possession of his imagination even as a little boy. In solitude, or in the society of Cumbrian shepherds, he loved to wander among the hills, to climb steep, craggy heights, to listen to the wind and mountain torrent, to watch the first buds of spring and the last touches of autumn in the trees and fields, and to revel in the winter snow and ice. Nature seemed to him imbued with life, full of terror and beauty, and ready to talk to man if he would but listen to her.

From this boyhood of dreamland he went to Cambridge, where he took his degree in 1791.

Meanwhile, the stirring events of the French Revolution had won the enthusiastic sympathy of the undergraduate.

In 1790, he had visited France and Germany, gathering materials on his journey for his first poem, *Descriptive Sketches*.

The following year, on leaving the University, he again visited France, and became absorbed in the wild excitements of the new Republic. But the later developments of the Revolution in France, the change from liberty to the tyranny of Napoleon, led the young enthusiast at length to sorrowfully recognise that nations, to make real progress, must "stand on the ancient ways."

By this time our poet had returned home, had published his two first poems, and was leading a life of poverty, made still heavier to bear by his sorrow at the overthrow of his ideals of political freedom. From poverty he was saved by a bequest of £900, a very modest fortune, but sufficient for his simple wants. From his despair he was roused by his sister Dorothy, a sweet woman, whose love and sympathy led her brother back to his early love—Nature in her simple, unerring moods. Under his sister's guidance he turned to poetry as "his office upon earth."

Settling at Racedown, in Dorset, in 1796, he, either in that year or in the preceding one, made the acquaintance of Coleridge. The two poets became fast friends, and, working partly at Racedown, partly at Alfoxden (near Coleridge's home), in sympathetic communion with each other and Dorothy, produced the *Lyrical Ballads*, published 1798. Some months travelling with Coleridge in Germany followed, and then the brother and sister retired to their much-loved Cumberland, settling first in a small cottage at Grasmere, and later at Rydal Mount.

In 1799, he contracted a marriage of great happiness with Mary Hutchinson, a companion of his boyhood. In one of his long poems—*The Recluse*—he gives a pleasant picture of his peaceful home-life with his loved wife and sister.

Occasional visits to Scotland, friendships with Lamb, Southey, Coleridge and Rogers, travels on the Continent, and a memorable farewell visit to Sir Walter Scott shortly

before the novelist's death, are the chief features of a long, uneventful life.

Wordsworth lived long enough to see his works revered and admired by thoughtful readers. He received the honour of poet laureateship in 1843, and died peacefully in his mountain home seven years later.

A modest stone in the little churchyard of Grasmere marks the resting-place of this poet of simple speech, who led the reading world on a voyage of discovery into the realms of Nature and of Man in his relation to Nature, revealing at every step beauties hitherto unnoticed in the most ordinary forms of life.

Purity of ideal, nobleness of thought, love of truth, even in the smallest details, are the characteristics of his verse. He saw, in the most familiar and humble conceptions of human life, subjects which could inspire poetic feeling and touch the heart. His penetrating imagination discovered poetic themes where other poets would have seen but the commonplace.

In language, in conjunction with Coleridge, he broke down the rhetorical eloquence of eighteenth-century writers, substituting simple words. He sought after a style which should be "the most remote possible from the false and showy splendour" he wished to explode. In metre he succeeded best in simple forms.

Of Wordsworth's poems, the *Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* appeared in 1793, and were followed by his only drama, *The Borderers*. The *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798 (published as the joint work of Wordsworth and Coleridge), contained his first great poetic work. The majority of the poems in the volume were from Wordsworth's pen. These lyrics, together with the other volumes of ballads and poems (1800-1807) and a mass of sonnets, include his most important and most charming work.

In the words of Matthew Arnold, "Nature" (in these poems) "herself seems to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, penetrating power."



In such simple tales as *Lucy Gray* and *Ruth*, in the beautiful lines on *Tintern Abbey* and in tender love poems, Wordsworth's pure imaginative genius found its most sympathetic subjects.

*The Prelude* (1806), which relates his poetical growth from childhood to manhood, and the *Excursion* (1814) are his longest poems. They contain some fine passages, but it is generally considered that he excelled best in his purely lyrical verse.

The poet continued to write sonnets, odes and poems on classical subjects till within a few years of his death, but his later work is of much less worth.

Wordsworth's prose took the form of essays. The Preface and Appendix to the *Lyrical Ballads* are fine specimens of poetic criticism. The poet's object, he declared, should be "to console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous."

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge** (1772-1834), Wordsworth's fellow-worker in creating romantic poetry, was a dreamer, who planned great schemes of work but carried little to completion.

He was born at Ottery St. Mary, in Devonshire, the son of the vicar of that parish. Even as a very small boy, he showed signs of much talent; it is said that he taught himself to read, and mastered many of the stories of *The Arabian Nights*, before he was four years old. Left an orphan in his ninth year, he was sent to London to be educated at Christ's Hospital. Bad food, in very small quantities, and brutal schoolmasters made life, at that time, in that famous school anything but happy. The clever, dreamy boy suffered much from the prevailing hardships, but managed to acquire, mostly through his intense love of reading, a great deal of miscellaneous knowledge, and before he left school had become head boy. Among his school companions was Charles Lamb.

He went to Cambridge in 1791, where he devoted himself to the classics and to general reading. He espoused the

cause of political freedom, and gained a reputation as an excellent talker. During a sojourn at Oxford, in 1793, he made the acquaintance of Southey, with whom a lasting friendship was formed.

A year or two later the two friends were at Bath, engaged to be married to two sisters, and forming a Utopian scheme of emigration. They intended to go, in company with another friend named Lovell, to some wild place in America, to found a colony on socialistic principles. All were to work two hours a day at farming, which they thought would be quite long enough to provide the necessities of life, and to devote the rest of their time to intellectual pursuits.

Their dream was never, however, realised, for they had to face the grim necessity of making a living for themselves and the ladies they wished to marry.

Coleridge tried lecturing and newspaper editing, and published a volume of poems.

Through the kindness of a friend, he obtained a little cottage and garden at Nether Stowey, near the Quantocks, Somerset, where he settled in 1797.

The friendship with Wordsworth had already begun; the two poets soon exchanged visits, and ere long William and Dorothy Wordsworth came to live near Coleridge, and the three lovers of Nature might be seen wandering together in the quiet woods of the Quantocks, discussing the beauties of their surroundings, exchanging poetic ideas, and planning the little book which, a year later, astonished the world. That year of companionship (1797-8) was the most productive in Coleridge's life. Inspired by his congenial friends, he completed the four poems (including *The Ancient Mariner*) which were his contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

An annuity of £150 offered him about this time by two enthusiastic friends, enabled him to start with Wordsworth for Germany, to study the language and literature of that country. German philosophy at once attracted Coleridge; he read deeply, and the influence of his German studies may be seen in all his after work.

On his return home, he for some time engaged in journalism and other literary work in London, but ultimately joined the Wordsworths in the North, taking up his residence at Greta Hall, near Keswick. Here he composed part of his second great poem, *Christabel*.

A little later, in 1803, Southey joined this community of poets.

A short span of happy, poetic union followed, and then Coleridge, falling a prey to rheumatism, sought consolation in opium-eating. Ever a thriftless man, prone to idle dreams, the habit of taking this destructive drug completed his ruin.

He left his wife and family to be maintained by Southey, and spent his time in fruitless travelling. He attempted many literary enterprises, gained some reputation as a lecturer and immense popularity as a talker, but the last thirty years of his life were in many respects wasted years.

In 1815, he was received into the household of some good folk at Highgate, and spent the remainder of his life with them.

The poetry of Coleridge consists of a series of fragments. Living in a veritable dreamland of poetic ideas, he planned and commenced many poems, but completed very few.

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, published in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), and the unfinished *Christabel*, published 1816, are his greatest poems.

*The Ancient Mariner* is a mystic tale of the sea. In the most vivid, picturesque language Coleridge tells of the sailing of the Mariner's ship into southern waters, of the Albatross which joined the boat as harbinger of good fortune, and all the terrible events which followed the killing of the bird. The lonely life of the Ancient Mariner amid the corpses of his comrades, the coming of rain and sleet and spectral winds, and the final deliverance of the Phantom Ship are the most exciting incidents of this weird tale. *Christabel*, written in 1798 and 1800, but never finished, is a marvellous story of enchantment, told in most beautiful musical verse. The poet adopted for this poem a ballad stanza discovered



by Spenser, but little used before Coleridge introduced it into modern verse.

Two odes, one *To the Departing Year* (1797), the other *To France* (1798), express the poet's anguish at the disaster which had overthrown his cherished dreams of freedom. *Kubla Khan*, *The Love Song of Genevieve* and other charming lyrics make up the volume of his work in poetry.

In prose he also attempted great things, but left much unfinished. As a critic of poetry he is one of the foremost in English literature. Some of his best work is seen in *Lectures on Shakespeare* and in the *Biographia Literaria*, which contains a splendid review of Wordsworth's poetry.

**Robert Southey** (1774-1843).—The life of Southey is a study of devotion to duty to his family and to the world. The son of an industrious linen-drapeer, he was cared for in his childhood by a maiden aunt. Under her guidance he was introduced to the works of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Spenser, and Pope. He was very ambitious to tread in the footsteps of these great masters, and composed in childhood a veritable mountain of verse.

Expelled from Westminster School, in 1792, because he contributed an article to the school magazine against flogging, he was sent the following year to Oxford.

Whilst at the University he made the acquaintance of Coleridge, and the two friends, both filled with enthusiasm for the new spirit of freedom, formed their wonderful scheme of emigration to America. Lack of funds prevented them from carrying out their plans, but did not stop them from marrying the two sisters, of Bristol, who were to have formed part of the emigrating party. In 1795 Southey, after secretly marrying the lady of his choice, went to Lisbon on a visit to an uncle. On his return home he tried law, but gave it up; and after many vicissitudes he settled down to literary work at Greta Hall, Keswick, near his friend Wordsworth.

Coleridge and his family had already taken up their abode there, and the party was further augmented by the coming of a widowed sister and her children.



Southey for many years worked at almost every form of literary work, in order to support this large household.

He had numerous friends in the world of letters—Shelley, Landor and Scott among them—and one implacable enemy in Lord Byron, who could never forgive him for having changed his opinions on the doctrines of the Revolution.

In 1813, Southey was created Poet Laureate, and some years later received a good pension.

He died, in 1843, in the mountain home in which he had spent some forty years of his life.

He gave the world a mass of writings, but he is no longer cherished as a great poet.

*Thalaba*, *The Curse of Kehama*, *Roderick*, *the Last of the Goths* and *Madoc*, which rank among his chief poems, were much esteemed in the poet's day. They contain some verse of great beauty, and are written in musical metre, but they lack the high imaginative power and the poetic passion which characterises the work of his greater contemporaries.

His *Vision of Judgment*, written on the death of George III., and after the poet had given up his revolutionary ideal and had become a staunch Conservative, is noteworthy for having called forth the bitter, masterful satire of Byron's *Vision*.

Of his shorter poems, *The Battle of Blenheim* and *Stanzas written in my Library*, are admirable specimens of his best work.

In the enormous amount of prose works Southey produced there is much of interest. He thoroughly knew and understood his subjects, and could write good, pure English. His *Life of Nelson* is a model of splendid biography.

**George Gordon, Lord Byron** (1788–1824).—There is no man in English literature who has been more enthusiastically worshipped or more vigorously condemned than Lord Byron. And his verse has been the source of as much contention as his life. Universally popular abroad, immensely praised and vigorously attacked in England, we are scarcely yet agreed on the niche of fame which he is ultimately to hold in the world of letters.

Compared with the sedately romantic Wordsworth, Byron is indeed a turbid, revolutionary and most unconventional spirit. His character, which is stamped on his work in a remarkable way, was to a great extent formed by the circumstances of his life.

On both his father's and mother's side, he came of a long and turbulent race of noblemen.

His father, a cruel and dissolute man, traced his pedigree back to the Norman Conquest. His mother, a passionate and hysterical woman, could claim that her ancestors had played a conspicuous part in Scottish history from the days of James I. of Scotland. George Gordon, the only son of this ill-matched couple, was born in London.

Two years after his birth the father deserted his wife, and Mrs. Byron removed with her son to Aberdeen, where she contrived, on the small income of £130 a year, to support her own proud and haughty spirit and to instil these very undesirable traits in her little boy.

Between outbursts of passion and immoderate huggings he was fairly spoilt, and, by the same injudicious treatment, a morbid sensitiveness, with respect to a club-foot he unfortunately possessed, was so encouraged that throughout life he remained painfully conscious of his lameness. In his tenth year this little boy became Lord Byron, and his mother at once returned to England to prepare him for the enjoyment of his lofty position. At Harrow and at Cambridge the lame but handsome, active and ambitious boy was a prominent figure. Ardent in friendship and hatred, devoted to sport (especially boating and swimming), and very fond of ostentatiously entertaining a knot of admirers, his days at Cambridge passed in gorgeous state, leaving little time for study. He was in many ways a precocious youth; at the age of fifteen he was in love, and before leaving college had completed a volume of verse, which he gave to the world, in 1807, under the title of *Hours of Idleness*. It was a worthless volume, and the just, though very severe criticism of *The Edinburgh Review* stirred him to better things, for two years later he published

a scathing satire on his Scottish reviewers, which, as a poem, was far more worthy of his great intellect.

On coming of age he entered into possession of his estate at Newstead, Notts, and had to face the difficult position of keeping up a large property on a small income. Disappointed with his reception in London society, he left England the same year to travel on the Continent. After visiting Portugal and Spain he went to Greece, where he spent the greater part of a year. In Greece it was that his poetic genius received its first true awakening. He returned home with a pile of manuscript, and the publication of the two first cantos of *Childe Harold*, in 1812, made him the most popular man in England.

Society accepted him into its innermost circles, and completed the petting and spoiling which had been begun in earlier years by his mother. His affectations and his pretended contempt of men and the world were at this time seen at their very worst.

In 1815, he married Miss Milbanke, a lady of considerable fortune. A year later, after the birth of their only daughter, Lady Byron left her husband, never to return; and the popular poet found all London turned against him. Stories were circulated, many of them untrue, making him out to be a dreadful villain. Filled with bitter feelings against his enemies, the poet left England vowing he would never return.

This crisis in his life produced a great change in his work. In his popular days he had been a pleasant musical versifier; in the days of his exile he developed into a great poet. All his important poems were produced during his sojourn in foreign lands. He first went up the Rhine to Switzerland, but ultimately he travelled to that home of the poets—Italy—living at Venice, Ravenna, Pisa, and Genoa. For eight years he led a lawless, tempestuous life; occasional intercourse with Shelley, a business connection with Leigh Hunt, and a few visits from English friends were his only links with his native land.

At length tired, and it may be ashamed, of his life, he



resolved to champion the cause of the Greeks in their struggle for political freedom. He set out for Greece in 1823, and, after many months of weary waiting in the Ionian Islands, landed at Missolonghi. Here many difficulties awaited him. The Greeks were quarrelling among themselves, and were ill prepared for war. Byron exhibited heroic patience and tact under most trying circumstances. At length his ragged army was prepared for battle, and the English poet was looking forward to victory, when he was struck down by fever and died at Missolonghi, surrounded by his lamenting soldiers.

His character has been much discussed and often harshly judged: his bad traits were known to all the world—indeed, he openly boasted of and exaggerated his shortcomings. He does not inspire our love and esteem for his person, but he has left a record in poetry which cannot lightly be overlooked. He is the only English poet of the nineteenth century who has attained European fame. Goethe thought him one of England's greatest poets, and the Italian Count Mazzini hailed him as the great Apostle of Democracy. In his own land the chorus of praise has not been so pronounced, but his brilliant genius cannot fail to give him a permanent place in literature.

In looking at Byron's work we are struck with the great quantity of poetry he produced during his short life, and with the great variety of subjects he treated.

The long list of his works include: *Childe Harold* (1812-17); *The Oriental Tales* (1813-15), of which *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, and *Lara* are most popular; *The Prisoner of Chillon*; *Prometheus*; *Manfred*, a drama (1816-17); *Lament of Tasso*; *Ode on Venice*; *Beppo* (1817); *Mazeppa*; *Don Juan* (1819-22); *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, *The Two Foscari*, *Cain*, *Heaven and Earth*, and *The Deformed Transformed* (dramas, 1820-21); *The Vision of Judgment*, a satire (1821-22).

Of these, *Don Juan*, *Cain*, *The Vision of Judgment*, and *Beppo* are considered his masterpieces. *The Vision of Judgment* is a scathing satire on society life, written as a counterblast to Southey's *Vision of Judgment*. *Beppo* is a witty



burlesque of fashionable life in Italy. *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan* may almost be regarded as poetical journals, in which the poet set down his ideas from day to day. *Don Juan* is the finer poem of the two. In the imaginary biography of Juan, Byron gave voice to his own experiences, interwoven with many brilliant episodes of society life and numerous satirical impressions.

Of his dramas, *Cain* and *Manfred* are the most powerful.

As regards his shorter poems, we have all in fancy been led captive to the Castle of Chillon, on the banks of the beautiful Lake of Geneva, and listened to the mournful tale of Byron's Prisoner.

**Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1792-1822).—The life of this highly imaginative, spiritual poet is even a more tragic story than that of his contemporary Byron. Like Byron, Shelley died in early manhood; but, unlike Byron, he died before the world had recognised his genius. Byron's works were selling by the ten thousand when Shelley could find only a few sympathetic friends to appreciate his poems. It was not till many years after the poet had met with his untimely death that the public heard the voice of a great poet in his unpopular poems, and recognised how great a loss to the realms of literature was the drowning in Italian waters of the young and hated revolutionist.

Shelley was born of ancient and honourable family at Horsham, Sussex, and at the age of ten was sent to Sion House School, Isleworth. He was at that time a bright, blue-eyed, golden-haired boy, possessed of a vivid imagination and a highly sensitive nature.

During his school-days at Isleworth, and later at Eton, he suffered from the persecutions of older and more robust boys. His sufferings at this time instilled in him that hatred of tyranny which became in after years an absorbing passion. But his school-life brought some happiness in the form of friendships. The dreamy, romantic boy was as passionate in love as in resisting injury, and carried through life happy memories of his school companions.

Whilst still at Eton he wrote a crude romance, which was published in 1810. He entered Oxford University, and, taking as his chief friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg, collaborated with him in writing a volume of poetry and a tract on Atheism. The publication of the tract led to his being expelled from the University. A sojourn in London, and a hasty and unhappy marriage with Harriet Westbrook, his sister's school-fellow, followed.

Reduced to a very small income through his father's anger, the poet and his wife dwelt in very humble lodgings, at one time near Southey at Keswick, but principally in London.

His revolutionary ardour found vent in vigorous pamphlets, and even led him to cross to Ireland in the hope of instilling his themes of truth and happiness in the Irish nation.

Returning to England in 1813, his poem *Queen Mab* was finished and privately circulated.

His friend Hogg has given us a picture of his life at this time, which is very characteristic of the poet's disregard of and indifference to the ordinary methods of living. He had given up meat and alcohol, and was living almost entirely on bread. He never took regular meals. If he felt hungry in the streets he went into a baker's shop and bought a loaf. "This he consumed as he went along, very often reading at the same time, and dodging the foot-passengers with the rapidity of movement which distinguished him." He could not understand why people wanted more than bread. A pudding he declared was "a prejudice"!

In his dress he was equally unconventional. He never wore a greatcoat, and generally went about with his collar unbuttoned, to let the air play freely on his throat. "In the street or road he reluctantly wore a hat, but in fields and gardens his little round head had no other covering than his long, wild, ragged locks." He was an immense reader; his lodgings were always crowded with books of all descriptions.

The years 1814-15 were a time of trouble, spent partly in England and partly on the Continent.

The suicide of his wife, from whom he had separated, and great money difficulties were among the disasters of these years.

In 1816, his father made him an allowance of £1,000 a year, and a happier era commenced. He found solace in the friendship of such good men as Leigh Hunt and Thomas Love Peacock, and in his marriage with Mary Godwin, daughter of the political writer, a talented woman who was afterwards known as a novelist. His income was largely dispensed in acts of charity. His sympathy with the poor and all who were in distress led him to open his purse to every case of need, though in his own life self-denial was largely exercised.

Ill-health, brought on to a great extent by neglect, led to the poet's leaving England, with his wife, for Italy, in 1818.

He never returned to his native land. Rome, Florence, Leghorn and Pisa were his chief haunts in Italy. The glorious scenery and artistic associations of this poet's land had a most inspiring effect upon him, though his life was not free from sorrow. One by one, he lost his loved children, and, in 1820, the sad death of Keats, before he had achieved the fame he longed for, had a saddening influence on Shelley's highly emotional nature. He was not, however, without friends. The occasional companionship of Byron, and, later, a happy association with a pleasant family named Williams, and a good friend, Trelawny, were sources of happiness to both the poet and his wife.

But in poetry Shelley found his chief solace. All his finest poems were produced during these years; they were written in the solitude of the woods or on board the little boat in which he loved to sail over the beautiful Italian waters.

Of his appearance and mode of life at this time a most vivid description is given by Trelawny. On the occasion of their first meeting he thus describes him: "Simply gliding in, blushing like a girl, a tall, thin stripling held out both his hands; and, although I could hardly believe, as I looked at his flushed, feminine, and artless face, that it could be the poet, I returned his warm pressure. . . . He was habited like

a boy, in a black jacket and trousers, which he seemed to have outgrown, or his tailor, as is the custom, had most shamefully stinted him in his 'sizings.'"

The poet's last home was a little house on the shores of the Gulf of Spezzia. Here the Shelleys, accompanied by the Williamses and Trelawny, settled in May, 1822.

It was a humble abode, looking more like a boat or bathing-house than a place to live in, situate in the midst of most picturesque scenery, and the poet was, as he declared, "content for the passing moment." He was far away from the turmoils of the world he hated, and free to roam about and enjoy to the utmost his surroundings. In solitary wanderings over the blue waters in his little skiff, in longer voyages with Williams and Trelawny in their yacht, a month passed peacefully.

But this delightful and inspiring time was not destined to last long. The arrival of Leigh Hunt at Leghorn, in June, led to Shelley leaving his home, accompanied by Williams, to welcome his old friend to Italy. On the return voyage their little craft was overtaken by a sudden storm and wrecked, all on board being drowned. Thus perished one of England's greatest poets.

His body, washed ashore near Via Reggio, was cremated, and the ashes buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome, hard by the grave of Keats. The epitaph, "Heart of Hearts," inscribed on his tomb expressed something of the love and devotion of the little band of mourners who gathered around his grave.

Shelley was inspired by a vivid imagination, an intense feeling for the beautiful, an ardent passion for truth, and a love of humanity and horror of oppression.

These lofty ideals, it must be owned, sometimes carried him into impossible realms of fancy; nevertheless, he has left his countrymen the best lyrics and some of the most exquisite familiar poems of the nineteenth century.

Of his chief poems, *Queen Mab* (privately published 1813) was his first important work. *Alastor* (1816) tells the life



wanderings and death of a lonely poet. *The Revolt of Islam* (finished 1818) unfolds Shelley's views of freedom and justice, in the story of a young poet-prophet who leads a nation to victory over despotism, but ultimately suffers martyrdom for his cause. *Julian Maddalo* (1819) contains one of his most marvellous descriptions of scenery in the lines on a Venetian sunset. The lovely elegy, *Adonais*, laments the death of Keats. *Epipsychidion* expresses his homage to the ideal in womanhood. It was called forth by the sorrowful history of a young lady shut up in an Italian convent.

The odes *To the West Wind*, *To a Skylark*, and *To Italy* are all of exquisite beauty. The ode *To the West Wind* has been claimed to be one of the first lyrics in the world.

*The Triumph of Life*, his last poem, was left unfinished.

His dramas include *The Cenci* (1819), by some critics thought to be the greatest poetic tragedy since Shakespeare, and the lyrical dramas of *Prometheus Unbound* (1819) and *Hellas* (1822).

In prose, Shelley is seen at his best in his letters written from Italy to friends in England, and in some splendid critical essays.

**John Keats** (1795-1821) is one of the most interesting and attractive figures in the group of Romantic poets.

Byron and Shelley both died in early manhood. Keats's little span of life was only twenty-five years.

He died unnoticed, unappreciated by the great world of letters, solaced in some measure by the admiration of so good a judge of poetry as Shelley, yet with little hope that posterity would enthrone him among the great poets.

Born in London, the son of a livery-stable keeper, Keats was educated at Enfield, where he met Charles Conder Clarke, a man of great ability, who encouraged his literary tastes and was a good friend to him in after life.

Leaving school in 1810, our poet was apprenticed for five years to a surgeon at Edmonton. The duties of a doctor's apprentice were by no means congenial to the highly imaginative youth, who eagerly fled from the drudgery of the surgery,

after his day's work was done, to the companionship of his books.

Virgil, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and especially Spenser, led him into a world of poetic enchantment; and at length, in 1817, he gave up the medical profession entirely, to wander without restraint in the realms of poetry.

The first volume of his poems (1817) appealed to an entirely unresponsive public, and, a year later, his first important poem, *Endymion*, met with a similar fate. It was most scornfully reviewed by the *Quarterly*. Keats's only consolation was the praise of the little coterie of literary men in London who recognised its merits.

Meanwhile, anxieties and domestic sorrows were gathering around the unsuccessful poet; his small stock of money was rapidly disappearing, his much-loved brother Tom lay dying of consumption, and his own health showed signs of the attack of the same terrible malady. But he struggled bravely on to perfect his art, that he might leave something behind him which would prove that he had not lived in vain.

His genius rapidly ripened, and the years 1818 to 1820 saw the production of his most beautiful poems.

In 1820, the already dying poet sailed for Italy, accompanied by his faithful friend and devoted nurse, Severn.

He died at Rome, in the arms of this good friend, and was buried in the Protestant cemetery there. Among the little group of mourners who gathered around his grave was Shelley, who not long after was laid to rest beside him.

Shelley paid a worthy tribute to the poet's memory in his elegy, *Adonais*; and the volume of Keats's poems found in Shelley's pocket after death proved that he was reading his friend's work during his fatal voyage.

Keats possessed, amid many noble traits of character, an intense modesty as to his own achievements. His accomplished work he valued at so low an estimate that he gave orders that the epitaph for his tomb should be, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." What the youngest of the Romantic poets would have accomplished, had his life

been spared longer, we can only guess; but the legacy of exquisite verse he has left us is alone sufficient to proclaim him a great poet.

Unlike Shelley, in that he cared nothing for the political upheavals and the unrestrained freedom which inspired much of his friend's verse, he is like him in his worship of the beautiful in Nature, and surpasses him in rich voluptuous melody. His impassioned imagination was inspired by an intense love of the beautiful. In his last days, he wrote: "If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me. Nothing to make my friends proud of my memory; but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered."

He has made himself remembered. The three volumes of verse published 1817, 1818, 1820 contain poems of immortal fame: *Endymion*, *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Pot of Basil* and his last and most exquisite fragment, *Hyperion*, are the chief products of his life.

In *Endymion*, *Lamia* and *Hyperion*, he treated stories of Greek life; *Isabella* is founded on a mediæval story of Boccaccio. Of his shorter poems, the odes, *On a Grecian Urn*, *To a Nightingale*, *To Autumn*, and his sonnets are most admired.

## PROSE WRITERS

**Sir Walter Scott** (1771-1832).—There are few names in English literature so widely known and so generally loved as that of the great Scottish novelist. His twenty-nine novels, to say nothing of his spirited narrative poems, are the companions of our youth and our esteemed friends in later life.

As the king of Romantic novelists, Scott's fame has travelled far from his native land. Wherever the English tongue is spoken his novels may be seen on library bookshelves. Translated into German and French, they have been widely read on the Continent, and have received the homage of such great critics as the German Goethe and the French M. Taine.

Walter Scott was born in Edinburgh. His father, a writer to the signet, and his mother, the daughter of Dr. Rutherford, Professor of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh, both derived their long descent from the turbulent heroes of the Borderland, who had fought and bled for their home and country in earlier and less peaceful centuries.

Illness in Scott's babyhood, which caused permanent lameness, led to his being sent to his grandfather's farm at Sandyknowe, where he passed several years, drinking in the sweet air of the wild country he loved in after years to picture in his novels, and learning many an old Border ballad.

In 1779, he was sent to the High School at Edinburgh, but gained little distinction as a scholar. It was during his school days that he commenced to make diligent search in Scottish legend and song.

At the University, antiquarian studies took up the time that should have been devoted to Latin and Greek, so that, by the time he entered his father's office to prepare for the legal profession, he was very learned in ancient Scottish writings, but had not acquired the kind of knowledge his father had desired for him. He, nevertheless, set to work with great diligence to master law books; devoting his spare time to long country rambles and fishing expeditions. Occasional trips into the heaths and glens of the Highlands and the pleasant Lowlands of the Borderland, on legal business, gave him opportunities for continuing his antiquarian pursuits. In the course of these long country jaunts, he collected a great mass of quaint romances and rural ballads, which had for centuries amused the country folk, but had never been published to the world. He also made the acquaintance of some of the delightful people who afterwards figured in his novels.

In 1797, he married Miss Charlotte Carpenter, with whom he lived very happily.

By the year 1800, Scott had accepted the post of Sheriff of Selkirkshire, and was getting ready for publication *The Border*



*Minstrelsy*. He had already published some old ballads, and intended in this volume to include a great mass of ancient poetry. He had a good income, and therefore had no cause to adopt literature as a profession.

A little later, he entered into partnership with his friend Ballantyne in a printing and publishing business—a most unfortunate undertaking, for it ultimately brought about his financial ruin.

*The Border Minstrelsy*, which contained, in addition to a great many interesting legends and songs, some original verse from Scott, was the first result of the partnership; it was published in 1802.

In 1804, he went to live at Ashestiel, a small house beautifully situated on a wooded hill above the Tweed. A year later the publication of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* gained him great popularity as a poet.

His first novel, *Waverley*, was commenced in 1805, but set aside because a friend gave an unfavourable opinion of the opening chapters.

The publication of *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake* raised the topstone of his fame as a poet. He made large sums of money, and was almost universally applauded. But success could not spoil the great man. His life is a long record of good and useful work—as Sheriff, as Clerk of the Sessions, and presently as country squire of a large estate. He was ever ready to do acts of kindness to poor neighbours, to give kindly help to friends, and sympathy, encouragement and appreciation to rival authors. Indeed, his love of doing good had no end. He was incapable of jealousy, and welcomed Byron as poet, although *Childe Harold* had surpassed his own work in public favour.

In 1811, the popular and prosperous author of *Marmion* purchased a domain on Tweedside, and commenced converting the old farm on the estate into the lordly castle of Abbotsford, in which for many years he dispensed hospitality to visitors innumerable.

One of his first literary efforts in his new home was to

finish the discarded story *Waverley*, which he discovered one day when looking for fishing tackle. It was completed with marvellous rapidity, and published anonymously in 1814. It took the world by storm. The reviewers declared that here was a novelist who could combine the realism of Fielding with the romantic spirit of the age.

*Waverley* was our first novel of national life, and opened a new epoch in the study of history in Europe.

For eleven years the wonderful series of *Waverley* Novels was continued. Scotland and England received each novel with renewed enthusiasm. "Opinion!" said Lord Holland, when someone asked him what he thought of *Old Mortality*. "We did not one of us go to bed last night; nothing slept but my gout."

And Germany and France were not long in echoing the strain of praise. Honours were heaped upon the great novelist. In 1819 he was made a baronet. A stream of visitors, English and foreign, made pilgrimage to Abbotsford to do homage to the great man; and, on a triumphal journey through England and Ireland, he was hailed everywhere as a literary giant.

But, unfortunately, this time of prosperity did not last. The publishing firm with which Scott was connected got into difficulties through unbusinesslike management. In 1826, they completely failed, and the prosperous author found himself liable for a sum of £117,000.

Offers of help were not wanting, but the proud and honest Scott refused them all. Asking only for time, he sat down to his desk to work with his pen to clear off the terrible load of debt.

The last years of his life, recorded in his *Journal*, are a more tragic story than any of the tales his lofty genius had conceived. He removed into lodgings in Edinburgh, and worked sometimes fourteen hours a day at his colossal task. But the strain was too great, even for his strong character and mighty bodily frame. His health broke down completely in 1829.

The insults of a mob at Jedburgh, and the unfavourable opinions of the publishers of his last novel, *Count Robert of Paris*, added to his misfortunes.

One long, vain journey to Malta and Italy, in search of health, was taken in 1832; and then he was brought back to die in his old home on the banks of the Tweed.

As a man, Sir Walter was one of the truly great. His high moral character, his affectionate nature, his undying courage in the most trying circumstances, have endeared him to all the world.

As an author, the creative power, which has given us a gallery of new and living people, the keen humour, the intense human sympathy which characterises all the stories evolved from his extraordinarily fertile imagination, remind us in some measure of the work of Shakespeare.

Scott had not, however, a great command of language; nor was he a perfect artist. He wrote rapidly and carelessly, and cared nothing for style; critics have also condemned the endings of many of his stories. But in so great a writer these drawbacks are trifling.

His poetry and novels are alike set in a beautiful background of scenery. The very atmosphere of the land he loved so well is around his characters; no one can read Scott's description of the wild country of the Highlands, or the peaceful scenes of the Lowlands, without realising something of the grandeur and charm of the scene.

His poetry does not rank as high as his novels; though, as a writer of romance in verse, he has few equals.

*The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805); *Marmion* (1808); *The Lady of the Lake* (1810); *Don Roderick* (1811); *Triermain* and *Rokeby* (1813); and *The Lord of the Isles* (1815), are his chief poems. Of these, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, and *The Lady of the Lake* are his best. All three are too well known to need describing. *The Lady of the Lake* is perhaps the most remarkable in descriptive power and invention.

The long series of novels, which commenced with *Waverley*

and ended with *Count Robert* and *Castle Dangerous*, are, with the exception of the last two, all masterpieces. They include tales founded on historical subjects—Scottish, English and Continental—pure romances and stories of familiar domestic life.

In the list of his chief works, which we append, we all have our special favourites, but it would be hard to select any one book as his greatest novel.

*Waverley* (1814); *Guy Mannering* (1815); *The Antiquary* (1816); *The Black Dwarf* (1816); *Old Mortality* (1816); *Rob Roy* (1817); *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (1818); *Bride of Lammermoor* (1819); *Legend of Montrose* (1819); *Ivanhoe* (1819); *The Monastery* (1820); *The Abbot* (1820); *Kenilworth* (1821); *Fortunes of Nigel* (1822); *Peveril of the Peak* (1823); *Quentin Durward* (1823); *Red Gauntlet* (1824); *The Betrothed* (1825); *The Talisman* (1825); *Woodstock* (1826); *Tales of a Grandfather* (first series, 1827; second series, 1828; third series, 1829); *Fair Maid of Perth* (1828).

**Jane Austen** (1775–1817) was born at Steventon, Herts, the daughter of the rector of the parish. The first twenty-five years of her life were spent in the quiet seclusion of this peaceful village. Her father gave her a much better education than girls of the eighteenth century usually received. She was proficient in French and Italian, and had a good acquaintance with English literature. She possessed beautiful hazel eyes and brown, curly hair, and grew up tall and graceful in figure. Her sweet, amiable disposition endeared her to everyone; children especially loved her, and delighted in her improvised stories.

Her first novels, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Northanger Hall*, were written at Steventon before she was twenty-two years of age. They remained in manuscript for many years before a publisher could be found for them.

In 1801, the young novelist removed with her family to Bath, and, after her father's death in 1805, settled for some time in Southampton. The last years of her life were spent in the



quiet village of Chawton, near Winchester. Here *Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion* were written, and her earlier novels were presented for the first time to the public.

Her health broke down in 1816, and she ended her quiet, uneventful life a year later at Winchester.

As a novelist Miss Austen was the originator of the realistic novel.

She chose as her subjects the English gentry of her own time, people with whom she was really familiar. Her heroes and heroines, and all the characters in her books, were ordinary, unromantic folk, and very often narrow-minded and ignorant; yet her careful, exquisitely artistic treatment makes every one of her stories delightful reading.

Perfectly designed characters, truthfully depicted in every detail of life, delicate wit and irony, and lucid, gay and faultless style are the characteristics of all her novels.

Sir Walter Scott wrote of her in his diary: "That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements, feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I have ever met with. The big bow-wow I can do myself like anyone going; but the exquisite touch which renders commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me."

Scott's generous approval has been echoed by many other writers. Coleridge, Southey, Sydney Smith and Macaulay unite in praise; and the generally-accepted opinion to-day is, that within the limits of the little world (the little bit of ivory she called it) Miss Austen so exquisitely painted, she is a perfect literary artist.

Of her works, only four were published during her life, and these anonymously. *Sense and Sensibility* appeared in 1811, *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, *Mansfield Park* in 1814, and *Emma* in 1816. *Northanger Hall* and *Persuasion* were first published in 1818, a year after her death.

**Charles Lamb** (1775-1834).—Within the charmed circle of talented men who graced the opening years of the nineteenth

century, the clever, genial and brilliantly humorous Charles Lamb is one of the best beloved.

His life exhibits no great deeds of glory, no magnificent display of fortune nor wildly romantic incident. It is the simple story of a Government clerk, who sacrificed love and all the ambitions which crowd into a young man's life to devote himself to the sad duty of caring for an afflicted sister and an imbecile father.

The son of a barrister's clerk, Charles Lamb was born, in humble circumstances, in a lodging in the Temple, London.

Through the kindness of his father's employer a presentation was obtained for him to Christ's Hospital. He entered this noted school in his eighth year, and underwent its somewhat severe training for some seven years. His school experiences are humorously described in his essay on Christ's Hospital.

Of all his schoolfellows, Coleridge was Lamb's most loved companion, and his affection for the dreamy philosopher lasted throughout life.

Leaving school, with a fair amount of scholarship and an intense love of reading, Charles had at once to set to work to earn his living.

He first held a humble post in the South Sea House; later, in 1792, he obtained a clerkship in the India House.

His family were at this time in poor circumstances. His father, who could no longer work, possessed nothing but a small legacy; his mother was an invalid; an old maiden aunt, who had carried much-envied dinners to her nephew at school, added her little annuity to the family funds; and Charles gave his small income; Mary, Charles's only sister, kept house, and made a little money by needlework; and so they all lived together in quiet lodgings, not altogether unhappily.

But, in 1796, a terrible disaster occurred, and our author's whole future life was clouded by the calamity. His sister, in a sudden fit of insanity, stabbed her mother. Charles, who was present, snatched the knife from her hand, and from

that time took the care of the household and guardianship of this afflicted sister upon his own shoulders. He gave up the prospect of marrying to devote himself to this sister, who, in her periods of sanity, repaid his affection with much valuable help.

Poverty, however, for long pressed upon them. Lamb's earliest poems, published in 1796, and articles in magazines brought but a small additional income; nevertheless, the good brother worked on cheerfully, never allowing his own cares to afflict other people. Gradually his excellent appreciation of literature and his delightful style of writing found admirers.

The *Tales from Shakespeare*, written in collaboration with his sister, was the first of his literary efforts to bring in much profit. A very welcome £60 was the result of their publication.

His poems and essays, collected and published in 1818, brought him some renown, and, although his income was never large, he was able to live comfortably for the remainder of his life. In the little house he took at Islington he was visited by many celebrated people, who enjoyed his genial hospitality, sparkling humour and kindly sympathy. Coleridge, Lloyd (a minor poet), Southey, Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt were his most cherished friends, and even the stately Wordsworth visited him.

The years 1818-25 saw the production of the charming essays of *Elia* and *Eliana*.

In 1820, after thirty years' service, Lamb retired from the India House on a pension, and removed to a cottage at Enfield.

He died at Edmonton in 1834.

His sister survived him thirteen years, and was laid by his side in the little churchyard of Edmonton.

The essays of *Elia* and *Eliana* are Lamb's chief contribution to literature.

The pathos and humour of his exquisite sketches of London sights and London people—the beggars, the Jews,

the actors and the hungry boys of Christ's Hospital—are models of artistic and natural writing.

As a critic, Lamb did much to educate public taste by his *Specimens of the Shakespearian Dramatists*.

*The Tales from Shakespeare*, the joint work of Charles and Mary, are the delightful companions of our childhood before we are old enough to appreciate the great dramatist himself.

In poetry, Lamb wrote pleasing sonnets and a good deal of miscellaneous verse.

He was also author of one prose story, *Rosamund Gray*, and of two unsuccessful plays.

**Walter Savage Landor** (1775–1864), poet and prose writer, is chiefly esteemed for his *Imaginary Conversations*.

He was the son of a doctor at Warwick, and was possessed of so ungovernable a temper that he was disgraced at Rugby School and expelled from Oxford. At the University he was known as the “Mad Jacobin.”

He published his first poems in 1795. Quarrelling with his father shortly afterwards, he left home, and retired to Wales, where he wrote his chief poem, *Gebir*, published 1798.

It found few admirers among the public, but brought him into contact with Southey, who remained a lifelong friend.

A volunteer expedition to Spain, to fight against Napoleon, and a period of quarrelsome squirehood in Wales were followed by a long sojourn in Italy. It was during this period that he produced the prose dialogues, which gave him his place among English men of letters.

The last years of his long life were spent in Florence, where he lived in health and prosperity, often visited by famous friends, and working in prose and poetry almost up to the time of his death.

Landor's works, especially *The Imaginary Conversations*, have found many admirers among accomplished intellectual people.

Mr. Swinburne calls him his “father and friend,” and numerous critics have written in high praise of his work.



With the general reader, however, he has never been popular, chiefly on account of his peculiarly fastidious style, but his great scholarship is undeniable.

He is seen at his best in the *Imaginary Conversations*, which treat of a great variety of subjects, ranging from Plato to Wordsworth.

His other prose works include *Examination of Shakespeare*, *The Pentameron*, and *Pericles and Aspasia*.

In poetry, the fantastic Oriental tale of *Gebir* is his chief work.

## XI.

# THE VICTORIAN AGE

1837-

**W**E have now traced the course of English literature from the earliest sign of the dawn of civilisation among our forefathers to the modern developments of the nineteenth century.

Each age has had its characteristic writers, interpreting the thought and spirit of their time.

We have learned to appreciate the good work of past ages, to select the works of genius and forget the worthless volumes, even though those volumes may sometimes have achieved great popularity in their author's day. It is, however, quite impossible to have so just an appreciation of our own times.

The Victorian era of English literature will, we may feel assured, be considered great by future historians ; but what works will be most esteemed, what forgotten, we must leave to future generations to determine. To-day we realise that we are living in a wonderful age, an age in which social and political reforms and great scientific discoveries are transforming our country.

**Influences at Work in Literature.**—From the passing of the Reform Bill, of 1832, to the present time, the nation has been constantly aroused by the cry of social and political reformers, and every writer in verse and prose has come within the spell of their influence.

Education has spread among all classes of the community, and the reading public has thus vastly increased.

Through the worthy efforts of the Englishman, Charles Knight, and the Scotchmen, Robert and William Chambers (1823-40), cheap editions of standard works, cyclopædias and useful magazines, have made the reading of good books for the first time possible to a large mass of the population.

An immense increase in periodical literature has followed the work of these pioneers of popular education. Magazines and journals, suitable for old and young, cultured and uncultured, are now produced in endless variety. Every kind of subject is treated, and in many different ways.

The extraordinary **scientific progress** of the age has also had enormous influence on writers. Great discoveries have in some respects altered the whole course of literature. The desire to know the truth about everything, and to take nothing for granted which cannot be proved is the basis of much modern teaching. Some authors have looked at everything through the spectacles of science; others, like the pre-Raphaelites, of whom Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the leader, have sought to prevent men from dwelling too much on the scientific side of literature by pleading for the imaginative and æsthetic side.

In **Theology**, the stirring events of the day and the search after truth in every direction have led many thoughtful men along different roads. The religious movement, known as the Tractarian, started at Oxford in the fourth decade of the century, and the Broad Church doctrine of its opponents express some of the diverse tendencies of religious thought.

Another great development of the age is **Criticism**. Carlyle, the chief exponent of German thought during the earlier years of the period, drew the attention of English writers to the patient research and thoroughness of German work, and English criticism profited thereby.

But to Matthew Arnold is due the first place in nineteenth-century criticism. His aim was to know the best that has been thought and written in all countries, ancient and modern. To appreciate a writer, he would say, we must enter into the spirit of his time in order to grasp his idea and be able to

look at the world from his point of view ; then "without a particle of spite or vice or malice," we may enter into the spirit of his work and form a just opinion of it.

We see, therefore, that above all things Victorian literature is many-sided. It is not possible to take one man or one book as characteristic of the age. We have an endless variety of authors, and all styles of verse and prose.

Never has there been so productive an age, never has there been so much diversity in subject and treatment. Social, practical and scientific subjects ; history, romance and fiction are all represented, and in many different styles. We have splendid examples of brilliant, well-balanced prose and perfectly constructed verse ; we have also a great deal of talented writing, which is either crude, commonplace, ungainly or obscure in style. Each writer follows his own tastes, without reference to any particular school.

But, although all styles and all subjects have been attempted, the general character of the work is critical, learned, practical and scientific rather than highly imaginative. Especially is this the case during the last thirty years of the century. Tennyson, Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Carlyle, Dickens, Thackeray, Macaulay and George Eliot produced their best works in the earlier decades ; renowned names in science, like Darwin, Huxley and Spencer, and in literary criticism, like Matthew Arnold and Rossetti, belong to the last thirty years.

In **Poetry**, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning, though not in any way connected by the nature of their verse, rank together as the two foremost poets of the age. Tennyson is by far the more popular poet ; for over sixty years his verse has been the delight and recreation of thousands of readers. From youth to old age he was a busy worker, pouring forth, with almost uniform excellence, exquisite, refined and highly melodious verse. In whatever metre he chose to interpret his beautiful conceptions he is ever sweet, graceful and highly artistic. His early impassioned lyrics proved that he had sat at the feet of Shelley



and Keats; the stirring influences of his own time inspired much of his later work.

His greatest poems include *In Memoriam* (published 1850), which deservedly ranks with England's greatest elegies; the famous *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, in which the poet appears, as he does in many of his poems, as patriot as well as poet; and the *Idylls of the King* (1859-72), that exquisite series of poems in blank verse which have interpreted to a nineteenth-century world the mystic beauty of the Arthurian legend.

Robert Browning's poetry is more intellectual than Tennyson's, but in the sweetness of rhythm he falls far short of his more popular contemporary. His masterpiece is *The Ring and the Book*, a long poem, in which the same story is told ten times from different points of view. Many of his love poems and such delightful lyrics as *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* are of general interest, but a great deal of his poetry is never likely to become popular. He is distinguished for his power of portraying real men and women, for his deep human sympathy and high imaginative gifts. In style he is often difficult and obscure, and much of his versification is hard, crude and eccentric.

Mrs. Browning (born Elizabeth Barrett) attained poet's fame long before her husband's work was appreciated. Amid a mass of poetry of varying interest, the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* are her greatest work; they will have an enduring charm as the most exquisite love poetry in our language from the pen of a woman.

Matthew Arnold, with whom the critical spirit prevailed even in his verse, is author of poems which have been declared to be "as solid and pure as granite and gold."

Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote ballads and sonnets (including *The Blessed Damozel* and *The King's Tragedy*) of great interest on account of their sincerity, novelty and exquisite melody.

His sister Christina has gained a lasting place in literature by her sonnets, *Monna Innominata*, numerous poems for children, and much sacred verse.

William Morris, a teller of old-world stories after the manner of Chaucer; Coventry Patmore, author of *The Angel in the House*; and Macaulay, whose ballads were at one time very popular, are other names connected with this era.

But happily the list of Victorian poets is not yet complete; in the rich, melodious verse of Mr. Swinburne, and in the work of numerous other writers, the great stream of English poetry, which has for so many centuries been growing in volume, is carried on to the next age.

**Drama.**—In the poetic drama, Browning published (between 1841-6) a series of plays under the title of *Bells and Pomegranates*, and Tennyson, during the latter part of his life, produced many dramas. Some of his plays have been acted, and one at least, *Becket*, with success.

In the prose drama, little has been done likely to be of much literary interest. Two of Bulwer Lytton's plays have retained popular favour and, towards the close of the century, witty comedies have been produced. But this is essentially a non-dramatic age.

**Prose.**—Although poets have not been wanting, it is when we turn to the prose writers that our paper becomes crowded with names. Every branch of prose literature is well represented.

In **History**, Thomas Carlyle and Thomas Babington Macaulay, both great writers, though differing in every particular in their characters, in their views of life and in their style of writing, rose to fame in the earlier decades of the period. Carlyle, in the *History of the French Revolution* (1837), in *Cromwell* (1845), and in *Frederick the Great* (1858-65), completed fine philosophic histories. All are tinged by Carlyle's pessimistic vision of the world he saw around him, all are characterised by his rugged, scornful manner and original style. Macaulay treated his subject, *History of England from the Accession of James II.* (published 1848-55-60), very differently. He was an optimist, who believed thoroughly in the greatness of his own time, and a strong Whig politician who viewed all historical events with party bias. His one-sided view of

his subject, his exaggeration and want of depth take from the value of his work, but he excels in narrative ; the history has been well styled "a historical novel drawn from authentic documents." Macaulay's style is clear and eloquent, but his work is somewhat marred by certain mannerisms.

James Anthony Froude wrote (1856-69), in most picturesque English, a vivid though inaccurate *History of the Tudors*.

Dr. Arnold, Connop Thirlwall, and George Grote, who, like Carlyle, had learned many useful lessons from German historians, produced good works on ancient history ; and, in the later decades of the century, the patient research of Professors Freeman, Lecky and Gardiner have resulted in Histories of England which, if not so attractive in style as those of Macaulay and Froude, are more accurate as history.

**Biography.**—All forms of biography have been and still are excessively popular. Future generations will certainly have no lack of information respecting the lives of important and even unimportant personages of the nineteenth century.

In an almost endless list of works, Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*, John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, George Henry Lewes's *Life of Goethe*, Froude's *Life of Carlyle* and Stanley's *Life of Dr. Arnold* are among the most noteworthy.

**Philosophy** is well represented by the two great thinkers, Mr. Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill, and by other important men.

In the long list of writers on **Theology** who adorn this age, Cardinal Newman, the chief literary exponent of the Oxford religious movement, holds the chief place on account of his command of simple, graceful and eloquent English.

Works on every branch of **Science** have been the outcome of the wonderful discoveries of the century. Among the scientific writers who have had the most direct influence on literature, Charles Darwin, whose epoch-making book, the *Origin of Species*, revolutionised literary as well as scientific thought, Henry Huxley and John Tyndall are chief.

**Novels.**—What the drama was to the Elizabethans, the novel is to the subjects of Queen Victoria. It is by far the

most popular form of present-day literature. Almost everyone who can read at all reads stories, and this demand for fiction has been supplied by a veritable host of writers. Romantic and realistic novels, humorous and satirical society novels, novels with a moral or social purpose, stories of adventure and of every conceivable incident in human life, have been, and still are being, produced in endless variety. This great era in fiction may be said to have commenced with the advent of Charles Dickens to public favour. Dickens gained the first place among the novel writers of his time by the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* in 1836-7. From that day to this his books have been universal favourites. *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Dombey and Son*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Bleak House*, and other novels from his pen are old and well-tried friends, who have stood the test of time. It is true the sentimental side of the stories is sometimes overdone, and the horrors are too vividly painted; but the marvellous humour, the originality of the characters, and the superb caricature of those phases of London life which Dickens knew better than any man fully atone for the artistic imperfections.

William Makepeace Thackeray, whose star of fame rose, in 1847, with the publication of *Vanity Fair*, has never been as popular as Dickens; but he possessed qualities of style and workmanship which to the cultured reader are more pleasing than Dickens's in some respects faulty work.

Thackeray was superbly humorous, a master of satire and epigram, and possessed of a marvellous style.

*Vanity Fair*, *Esmond*, *Pendennis*, *The Newcomes* and *The Virginians* are magnificent novels.

In 1847, the publication of a story entitled *Jane Eyre* drew the attention of the reading public to a remote Yorkshire vicarage, where three sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, living in the wild seclusion of their native moorlands, were employing the spare moments of their isolated monotonous lives in writing stories and verse. Charlotte was the most talented of the three. Although marred by extrava-



gances of style and defects of plot, *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette* have attained a durable reputation.

Mrs. Gaskell, who gained popularity about the same time as Charlotte Brontë, lived also a secluded life in a country town. In character, however, she differed widely from the severe, grim and serious-minded author of *Jane Eyre*. A pleasing, flowing style, a sympathetic humour characterise Mrs. Gaskell's books, of which *Mary Barton* (1848), *Cranford* and *North and South* are best known.

Yet another great woman novelist is seen in Mary Ann Evans, who, under the *nom de plume* of George Eliot, was for many years the most prominent novelist in England. *Scenes from Clerical Life* (1858), her first novel, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, *Romola*, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* are her chief works.

George Eliot was a highly intellectual writer and a student of philosophy. Her early novels are generally preferred to her later works, in which philosophic teaching somewhat mars the beauty of the stories as pure works of fiction. She holds a high place in the ranks of English novelists. In the opinion of a great foreign critic, she is author of "the most perfect novels yet known."

Among other writers of this most popular form of literature Bulwer Lytton produced some of his best work in this reign; Charles Kingsley's historical romances have many admirers; and the delightful stories of Robert Louis Stevenson, written in simple, clear and eloquent English, are likely to interest future generations.

Among **Miscellaneous Writers**, Matthew Arnold, in his *Essays on Criticism* and other essays on social and theological subjects, exhibited great learning and judgment in language which is a veritable masterpiece of style.

Mr. Ruskin is justly renowned as a writer on art, morals, economics and society. His greatest works are *Modern Painters*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *Stones of Venice*. In all he is a seeker after truth, and expresses himself in splendid language.

Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, *Heroes and Hero Worship* and his *Essays* contain some of the rugged philosopher's best work.

Walter Pater's *Studies in the Renaissance* and his *Marius the Epicurean* are models of exquisite prose.

These and many other books of travel, of geographical discovery and of miscellaneous writings of all kinds, prove what busy years in literature the sixty odd years of Queen Victoria's reign have been.

Nor are writers in the English language any longer confined to our own little islands. From the great continent of America, from the far-distant colonies of Australia and South Africa, come reinforcements to swell the ranks of the immense army of authors. One and all write in the great, rich English language, the language of Shakespeare and Chaucer, which traces its origin to that wild, rude land on the shores of the Baltic, where, so many centuries ago, our first crude poem, *The Romance of Beowulf*, was composed.

# BIOGRAPHICAL LIST OF AUTHORS

## MENTIONED IN THIS VOLUME

Addison, Joseph . . . . .	1672-1719	Browning, Elizabeth Barrett . . . . .	1809-1861
Akenside, Mark . . . . .	1721-1770	Browning, Robert . . . . .	1812-1889
Alcuin . . . . .	735-804	Bulwer, Edward Lytton . . . . .	1803-1873
Aldhelm . . . . .	656-709	Bunyan, John . . . . .	1628-1688
Alfred . . . . .	849-901	Burke, Edmund . . . . .	1729-1797
Alfric . . . . .	11th cent.	Burnet, Bishop . . . . .	1643-1715
Aneurin . . . . .	6th cent.	Burney, Fanny . . . . .	1752-1840
Arbuthnot, Dr. John . . . . .	1667-1735	Burns, Robert . . . . .	1759-1796
Arnold, Matthew . . . . .	1822-1888	Burton, Robert . . . . .	1577-1640
Arnold, Dr. Thomas . . . . .	1795-1842	Butler, Bishop . . . . .	1692-1752
Ascham, Roger . . . . .	1515-1568	Butler, Samuel . . . . .	1612-1680
Asser . . . . .	9th cent.	Byron, Lord . . . . .	1788-1824
Austen, Jane . . . . .	1775-1817		
Bacon, Sir Francis . . . . .	1561-1626	Caedmon . . . . .	7th cent.
Bacon, Roger . . . . .	1214-1292	Camden, John . . . . .	16th cent.
Baker, Sir Richard . . . . .	1568(?) - 1645	Campbell, Thomas . . . . .	1777-1844
Barbour, John . . . . .	1316(?) - 1395	Capgrave, John . . . . .	1393-1464
Barclay, Alexander . . . . .	1475(?) - 1552	Carew, Thomas . . . . .	17th cent.
Baillie, Joanna . . . . .	1762-1851	Carlyle, Thomas . . . . .	1795-1881
Barrow, Isaac . . . . .	1630-1677	Cavendish, George . . . . .	1500-1561(?)
Barrow, Sir John . . . . .	1764-1848	Caxton, William . . . . .	1422(?) - 1491(?)
Baxter, Richard . . . . .	1615-1691	Chalmers, Dr. . . . .	1780-1847
Beaumont, Francis . . . . .	1584-1616	Chapman, George . . . . .	1559(?) - 1634
Beddoes, T. L. . . . .	1803-1849	Chatterton, Thomas . . . . .	1752-1770
Bede . . . . .	673-735	Chaucer, Geoffrey . . . . .	1340(?) - 1400
Behn, Aphra . . . . .	1642-1689	Chesterfield, Earl of . . . . .	1694-1773
Bellenden, John . . . . .	d. 1550	Chillingworth, William . . . . .	1602-1644
Bentham, Jeremy . . . . .	1748-1832	Churchyard, Thomas . . . . .	1520(?) - 1604
Bentley, Richard . . . . .	1662-1742	Cibber, Colley . . . . .	1671-1757
Berkeley, George . . . . .	1685-1753	Clanvowe, Sir Thomas . . . . .	fl. 1400
Berners, Lord . . . . .	1467-1532	Clarendon, Edward Hyde, Earl of . . . . .	1609-1674
Blair, Robert . . . . .	1699-1746	Clarke, Samuel . . . . .	1675-1729(?)
Blake, William . . . . .	1757-1827	Coleridge, Samuel Taylor . . . . .	1772-1834
Bolingbroke, Lord . . . . .	1678-1751	Collier, Jeremy . . . . .	1650-1726
Boswell, James . . . . .	1740-1795	Collins, William . . . . .	1721-1759
Brontë, Charlotte . . . . .	1816-1855	Congreve, William . . . . .	1670-1729
Browne, Sir Thomas . . . . .	1605-1682	Constable, Henry . . . . .	1562-1613
Browne, William . . . . .	1591-1643		

- Cornac . . . . . 9th cent.  
 Coverdale, Miles . . . 1488-1568  
 Cowley, Abraham . . . 1618-1667  
 Cowper, William . . . 1731-1800  
 Crabbe, George . . . 1754-1832  
 Cranmer, Thomas . . . 1489-1556  
 Crashaw, Richard . . . 1613 (?) - 1649  
 Cynewulf . . . . . 8th or 11th cent.
- Dampier, William . . . 1652-1715  
 Daniel, Samuel . . . 1562-1619  
 Darwin, Charles . . . 1809-1882  
 Darwin, Erasmus . . . 1731-1802  
 Davenant, Sir William . 1606-1668  
 Davies, Sir John . . . 1569-1626  
 Defoe, Daniel . . . 1661 (?) - 1731  
 Dekker, Thomas . . . 1570 (?) - 1641 (?)  
 Denham, Sir John . . . 1615-1669  
 De Quincey, Thomas . . 1785-1859  
 Donne, John . . . 1573-1631  
 Dorset, Earl of . . . 1637-1706  
 Dickens, Charles . . . 1812-1870  
 Disraeli, Benjamin . . . 1804-1881  
 Douglas, Gawin . . . 1474 (?) - 1522  
 Drayton, Michael . . . 1563-1631  
 Drummond, William . . . 1585-1649  
 Dryden, John . . . 1631-1700  
 Dunbar, William . . . 1465 (?) - 1530 (?)  
 Dunstan, Archbishop . . 924-988
- Edgeworth, Maria . . . 1767-1849  
 Eliot, George (Mary Ann Evans) . . . 1819-1880  
 Elyot, Sir Thomas . . . 1490 (?) - 1546  
 Erigena . . . . . 9th cent.  
 Etherege, Sir George . . 1634-1691  
 Evelyn, John . . . 1620-1706
- Farquhar, George . . . 1678-1707  
 Ferrier, Susan . . . 1782-1854  
 Fielding, Henry . . . 1707-1754  
 Fisher, John . . . 1459 (?) - 1535  
 Fletcher, Giles . . . 1588 (?) - 1623  
 Fletcher, John . . . 1579 (?) - 1625  
 Fletcher, Phineas . . . 1582-1650  
 Ford, John . . . . . 17th cent.  
 Fortescue, Sir John . . . 15th cent.  
 Foxe, John . . . 1516-1587  
 Franklin, Sir John . . . 1786-1847  
 Freeman, Edward  
   Augustus . . . . . 1823-1892  
 Froude, James Anthony . 1818-1894  
 Fuller, Thomas . . . 1608-1661
- Garth, Sir Samuel . . . 1661-1719  
 Gascoigne, George . . . 1525-1577  
 Gaskell, Elizabeth . . . 1810-1865  
 Gay, John . . . . . 1685-1732  
 Geoffrey of Monmouth . . *d.* 1154  
 Gibbon, Edward . . . 1737-1794  
 Gildas . . . . . 6th cent.  
 Godwin, William . . . 1756-1836  
 Goldsmith, Oliver . . . 1728-1774  
 Googe, Barnabee . . . 1540-1594  
 Gower, John . . . 1325 (?) - 1408  
 Grafton, Richard . . . 16th cent.  
 Gray, Thomas . . . 1716-1771  
 Green, Matthew . . . 1696-1737  
 Greene, Robert . . . 1560 (?) - 1592  
 Greville, Fulke, Lord  
   Brooke . . . . . 1554-1628  
 Grosseteste, Robert . . . 1175-1253  
 Grote, George . . . 1794-1871
- Habington, William . . . 1605-1654  
 Hakluyt, Richard . . . 1552 (?) - 1616  
 Hall, Robert . . . 1764-1831  
 Hallam, Henry . . . 1778-1859  
 Harry, the blind minstrel . 15th cent.  
 Hawes, Stephen . . . *d.* 1523 (?)  
 Hazlitt, William . . . 1778-1830  
 Henry of Huntingdon . . . 1084 (?) - 1155  
 Henryson, Robert . . . 15th cent.  
 Herbert, George . . . 1593-1633  
 Herrick, Robert . . . 1591-1674  
 Heywood, John . . . 16th cent.  
 Higden, Ralph . . . 14th cent.  
 Hobbes, Thomas . . . 1588-1679  
 Holinshed, Raphael . . . 16th cent.  
 Hood, Tom . . . 1799-1845  
 Hooker, Richard . . . 1554 (?) - 1600  
 Howell, James . . . 1594 (?) - 1666  
 Hume, David . . . 1711-1776  
 Hunt, Leigh . . . 1784-1859  
 Huxley, Thomas Henry . . 1825-1895
- James I. . . . . 1394-1437  
 Jeffrey, Francis . . . 1773-1850  
 John of Salisbury . . . *d.* 1180  
 John of Trevisa . . . 14th cent.  
 Johnson, Samuel . . . 1709-1784  
 Jonson, Ben . . . 1574-1637  
 Joseph of Exeter . . . 12th cent.
- Keats, John . . . 1795-1821  
 Kingsley, Charles . . . 1819-1875



- Knolles, Richard . 1550-1610  
 Knowles, J. S. . 1784-1862  
 Knox, John . 1505-1572  
 Knox, Robert . 17th cent.  
 Kyd, Thomas . 16th cent.  
  
 Lamb, Charles . 1775-1834  
 Landor, Walter Savage 1775-1864  
 Langland, William 1330 (?) - 1400 (?)  
 Latimer, Hugh . 1485 (?) - 1555  
 Law, William . 1686-1761  
 Layamon . 1150 (?) - 1210 (?)  
 Lee, Nathaniel . 1655-1692  
 Leland, John . 1506 (?) - 1552  
 Lewis, George Henry 1817-1878  
 Lingard, John . 1771-1851  
 Locke, John . 1632-1704  
 Lockhart, John Gibson 1793-1854  
 Lodge, Thomas . 1558-1625  
 Lovelace, Richard . 1618-1658  
 Lydgate, John . 1370 (?) - 1448 (?)  
 Lyly, John . 1554 (?) - 1606  
 Lyndsay, Sir David 1490 (?) - 1555  
  
 Macaulay, Thomas  
     Babington . 1800-1859  
 Mac Crie, Thomas . 1772-1835  
 Mackenzie, Henry . 1745-1831  
 Mackintosh, Sir James 1765-1832  
 Macpherson, James . 1736-1796  
 Malory, Sir Thomas . 15th cent.  
 Malthus, Thomas . 1766-1834  
 Mandeville, Bernard de 1670-1733  
 Mannyng, Robert . 14th cent.  
 Map, Walter . 1143 (?) - 1210  
 Marlowe, Christopher 1564-1593  
 Marston, John . 1570 (?) - 1634  
 Marvell, Andrew . 1621-1678  
 Massinger, Philip . 1583-1640  
 Matthew of Paris . *d.* 1259  
 May, Thomas . 1595-1650  
 Merlin . 6th cent.  
 Middleton, Thomas 1570 (?) - 1627  
 Mill, James . 1773-1836  
 Mill, John Stuart . 1806-1873  
 Milton, John . 1608-1674  
 Minot, Laurence . 14th cent.  
 Mitford, William . 1744-1827  
 Montagu, Lady Mary 1689-1762  
 Montague, Charles, Lord  
     Halifax . 1651-1715  
 Moore, Thomas . 1779-1852  
 More, Sir Thomas . 1478-1535  
  
 Morris, William . 1834-1896  
 Mulgrave, Earl of . 1649-1721  
  
 Napier, Sir William . 1785-1860  
 Nash, Thomas . 1567-1601  
 Nennius . 8th or 9th cent.  
 Newman, Cardinal . 1801-1890  
 Newton, Sir Isaac . 1642-1727  
 Nicholas of Guildford 13th cent.  
 North, Sir Thomas 1510 (?) - 1560  
 Norton, Thomas . 1532-1584  
  
 Occleve, Thomas 1370 (?) - 1448 (?)  
 Odericus Vitalis 1067 (?) - 1142  
 Orm or Orrmin . 13th cent.  
 Oswald of Worcester . 10th cent.  
 Otway, Thomas . 1652-1685  
 Overbury, Sir Thomas 1581-1613  
  
 Paine, Thomas . 1737-1809  
 Paley, William . 1743-1805  
 Parnell, Thomas . 1679-1718  
 Pater, Walter . 1839-1894  
 Patmore, Coventry . 1823-1896  
 Pearson, John . 1613-1686  
 Peacock, Thomas Love 1785-1866  
 Pecock, Reginald . 1390-1460  
 Peele, George . 1550 (?) - 1598  
 Pepys, Samuel . 1633-1703  
 Percy, Thomas . 1729-1811  
 Phaer, Thomas . 1510 (?) - 1560  
 Philips, Ambrose . 1675-1749  
 Philips, John . 1676-1709  
 Poor, Bishop . 13th cent.  
 Pope, Alexander . 1688-1744  
 Prior, Mat . 1664-1721  
 Purchas, Samuel . 1577-1626  
 Puttenham, Webster . 16th cent.  
  
 Quarles, Francis . 1592-1644  
  
 Radcliffe, Ann . 1764-1823  
 Raleigh, Sir Walter . 1552-1618  
 Ramsay, Allan . 1686-1758  
 Reynolds, Sir Joshua . 1723-1792  
 Ricardo, David . 1772-1823  
 Richardson, Samuel . 1689-1761  
 Ridley, Nicholas . 1500-1555  
 Robert of Gloucester . *fl.* 1295  
 Robertson, William . 1721-1793  
 Rochester, Earl of . 1647-1680  
 Rogers, Samuel . 1763-1855  
 Rolle, Richard . *d.* 1349

- |                         |              |                        |                       |
|-------------------------|--------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Roscommon, Earl of .    | 1634-1684    | Taylor, Jeremy .       | 1613-1667             |
| Rossetti, Christina .   | 1830-1894    | Temple, Sir William .  | 1628-1699             |
| Rossetti, Dante Gabriel | 1828-1882    | Tennyson, Alfred Lord  | 1809-1892             |
| Ruskin . . . .          | b. 1819      | Thackeray, William     |                       |
|                         |              | Makepeace .            | 1811-1863             |
| Sackville, Thomas (Lord |              | Thirlwall, Connop .    | 1797-1875             |
| Buckhurst) . .          | 1536-1608    | Thomson, James .       | 1700-1748             |
| Scott, Sir Walter .     | 1771-1832    | Tickell, Thomas .      | 1686-1740             |
| Sedley, Sir Charles .   | 1639-1701    | Tillotson, John, Arch- |                       |
| Shaftesbury, Anthony,   |              | bishop . . .           | 1630-1694             |
| Earl of . . .           | 1671-1713    | Tourneur, Cyril .      | <i>fl.</i> 17th cent. |
| Shakespeare, William    | 1564-1616    | Turberville, George    | 1530(?)-1600(?)       |
| Shelley, Percy Bysshe   | 1792-1822    | Tyndale, William .     | 1484-1536             |
| Sheridan, Richard       |              | Tyndall, John . .      | 1820-1893             |
| Brinsley . . .          | 1751-1816    | Udall, Nicholas .      | 1505-1556             |
| Sherlock, William .     | 1641-1707    | Usk, Thomas . . .      | d. 1388               |
| Shirley, James . .      | 1596-1666    | Vanbrugh, Sir John .   | 1672-1726             |
| Sidney, Sir Philip .    | 1554-1586    | Vaughan, Henry .       | 1621-1695             |
| Skelton, John . .       | 1460-1529(?) | Wace . . . . .         | 12th cent.            |
| Smith, Adam . . .       | 1723-1790    | Waller, Edmund .       | 1605-1687             |
| Smith, Sydney . .       | 1771-1845    | Walpole, Horace .      | 1717-1797             |
| Smollett, Tobias .      | 1721-1771    | Walton, Izaak . .      | 1593-1683             |
| South, Robert . .       | 1633-1716    | Warburton, William     | 1698-1779             |
| Southerne, Thomas       | 1660-1746    | Warner, William .      | 1558(?)-1609          |
| Southey, Robert .       | 1774-1843    | Warton, Thomas .       | 1728-1790             |
| Speed, John . . .       | 1552-1629    | Watson, Thomas .       | 1557-1592             |
| Spelman, Sir Henry      | 1562-1641    | Webster, John . .      | 17th cent.            |
| Spencer, Herbert .      | b. 1820      | White, Gilbert . .     | 1720-1793             |
| Spenser, Edmund .       | 1552-1599    | William of Malmesbury  | 1095(?)-1142          |
| Stanley, Arthur Penrhyn | 1815-1881    | William of Shoreham .  | 14th cent.            |
| Steele, Sir Richard .   | 1672-1729    | Wilson, John . . .     | 17th cent.            |
| Sterne, Laurence .      | 1713-1768    | Wilson, Thomas .       | 1526(?)-1581          |
| Stevenson, R. L. .      | 1850-1894    | Wither, George . .     | 1588-1663             |
| Stillingfleet, Edward   | 1635-1699    | Wordsworth, William    | 1770-1850             |
| Stow, John . . . .      | 1525-1605    | Wulfstan . . . .       | 11th cent.            |
| Suckling, Sir John .    | 1609-1643    | Wyatt, Sir Thomas .    | 1503-1542             |
| Surrey, Henry Howard,   |              | Wycherley, William .   | 1640-1715             |
| Earl of . . .           | 1517-1547    | Wyclif, John . . .     | 1324-1384             |
| Swift, Jonathan . .     | 1667-1745    | Young, Edward . .      | 1681-1765             |
| Swinburne, Algernon     |              |                        |                       |
| Charles . . . .         | b. 1837      |                        |                       |

# INDEX

- Abbot, The*, 264.  
*Absalom and Achitopel*, 139, 147, 149.  
*Accounts of an Expedition in the Northern Seas*, 75.  
*Adam Bede*, 277.  
 Addison, Joseph, 157, 165, 180-4.  
*Address to my Mother's Picture*, 205.  
*Adonais*, Elegy of, 257.  
*Advancement of Learning, The*, 83, 114.  
*Adventures of Count Fathom*, 222.  
*Aids to Reflection*, 241.  
 Akenside, Mark, 192.  
*Albion's England*, 78.  
*Alchemist, The*, 82, 102.  
*Alastor*, 256.  
 Aldhelm, 4, 8.  
 Alfred, 4, 8, 14-17.  
 Alfric, 9.  
*Alexander's Feast*, 139, 149.  
*All for Love*, 149.  
 Alliterative verse, 6, 35, 46.  
*All's Well that End's Well*, 98.  
*Alphonsus*, 81.  
*Amelia*, 221.  
*Amoretti Sonnets*, 89.  
*Analogy of Revealed Religion*, 168.  
*Anatomy of Melancholy*, 121.  
*Ancient Mariner, The*, 234, 246.  
*Andrew, St., Legend of*, 7.  
*Angel in the House, The*, 274.  
 Aneurin, 1.  
*Anglo-Saxon Church, History of the*, 8, 13, 15.  
*Annals of the Four Masters of Ulster*, 2.  
*Annus Mirabilis*, 138, 148.  
 Anselm, 19.  
*Antony and Cleopatra*, 99.  
*Antiquary, The*, 264.  
 Aquinas, Thomas, 23.  
 Arbuthnot, John, 167.  
*Arcades*, 126.  
*Arcadia*, 84, 108.  
*Areopagitica*, 127.  
 Ariosto, 87.  
 Arnold, Dr., 275.  
 Arnold, Matthew, 271, 273, 277.  
*Art of English Poetry*, 54.  
*Art of Political Lying, The*, 167.  
*Art of Rhetoric*, 54.  
 Arthur, King, 1, 22, 25.  
 Ascham, Roger, 54, 75, 106.  
*Assembly of Ladies, The*, 35.  
*Astræa, Redux*, 148.  
*Astrophel and Stella*, 77, 108.  
*As You Like It*, 98.  
 Augustine, Saint, 4.  
 Austen, Jane, 237, 264.  
 Bacon, Roger, 24.  
 Bacon, Sir Francis, 72, 83, 84, 112-6.  
 Baker, Sir Richard, 121.  
 Baillie, Joanna, 241.  
*Ballad of Charity, The*, 203.  
 Ballads, 55.  
 Barbour, John, 36.  
 Barclay, Alexander, 56.  
*Bard, The*, 200.  
*Barons' Wars*, 78.  
 Barrow, Isaac, 143.  
 Barrow, Sir John, 240.  
*Bartholomew Fair*, 102.  
*Battle of Agincourt, The*, 78.  
*Battle of Blenheim*, 249.  
*Battle of Books, The*, 167, 177, 179.  
*Battle of the Baltic*, 235.

- Battle of the Summer's Islands*, 130.  
 Baxter, Richard, 121.  
 Beaumont, Francis, 82, 104.  
 Beddoes, T. L., 237.  
 Bede, 4, 5, 8, 13.  
*Beggar's Opera*, 164.  
 Behn, Aphra, 145.  
 Bellenden, John, 55.  
 Benedict, Biscop, 13.  
 Bentham, Jeremy, 241.  
 Bentley, Bishop, 168.  
 Bentley, Richard, 144.  
*Beowulf, Romance of*, 9-11.  
*Beppo*, 236, 252.  
 Berkeley, Bishop, 157, 188.  
 Bernart de Ventadorn, 25.  
 Berners, Lord, 53.  
*Betrothed, The*, 264.  
*Black Dwarf, The*, 264.  
*Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 196.  
 Blake, William, 193.  
 Blair, Robert, 163.  
 Blank verse, 57, 70.  
*Bleak House*, 276.  
*Blessed Damozel, The*, 273.  
*Blickling Homilies*, 9.  
 Bible, The, 37, 48, 53, 66, 83.  
*Biographia Literaria*, 239, 248.  
 Boccaccio, 33.  
 Boëthius, 8, 15.  
 Boileau, 137.  
 Bolingbroke, Lord, 168.  
*Book of Philip Sparrow, The*, 69.  
*Book of the Duchess*, 41.  
*Borderers, The*, 244.  
*Border Minstrelsy, The*, 258.  
*Borough, The*, 236.  
 Boswell, James, 196, 207.  
*Bride of Lammermoor*, 264.  
 Brontë, Charlotte, 276.  
 Brontës, The, 276.  
 Brooke, Lord, 78.  
 Browne, Sir Thomas, 121.  
 Browne, W., 78.  
 Browning, Mrs., 272, 273.  
 Browning, Robert, 272.  
*Bruce, The*, 36.  
*Brunanburh, Battle of*, 7.  
*Brut d'Angleterre*, 26.  
 Bulwer, E. Lytton, 238, 274, 277.  
 Bunyan, John, 145, 154.  
 Burke, Edmund, 196, 229.  
 Burke's Essays and Pamphlets, 229.  
 Burnet, Bishop, 144, 157.  
 Burney, Miss, 195.  
 Burns, Robert, 193, 205-7.  
 Burton, Robert, 121.  
 Butler, Bishop, 168.  
 Butler, Samuel, 138.  
*Byrhtnoth's Death, or Battle of Malden*, 7.  
 Byron, Lord, 235, 241, 249-53.  
*Cadenus to Vanessa*, 178.  
 Caedmon, 7, 11-13.  
*Cain*, 252.  
 Campbell, Thomas, 235.  
 Camden, William, 84.  
*Campaign, The*, 163, 180.  
*Canterbury Tales*, 31, 42.  
 Carew, Thomas, 119.  
 Carlyle, Thomas, 240, 272, 274.  
 Carlyle's Essays, 278.  
*Cashel, Psalter of*, 2.  
*Castle of Health, The*, 54.  
*Castle of Indolence*, 163.  
*Castle Otranto*, 194.  
*Catiline*, 102.  
*Cato*, 164-81.  
 Cavendish, George, 55.  
 Caxton, William, 38, 50, 53.  
*Cenci, The*, 257.  
 Chalmers, Dr., 241.  
 Chapman, George, 82.  
*Characteristics*, 168.  
 Chatterton, Thomas, 192, 201-3.  
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, 31, 33, 37, 38-45.  
*Chaucer's Dream*, 35.  
*Childe Harold*, 236, 251, 253.  
 Chillingworth, William, 121.  
 Christ, Cynewulf's, 7, 12.  
*Christ, Life of*, Allegory of the, 7.  
*Christ's Victory*, 78.  
*Christabel*, 234, 247.  
*Chronicle, Anglo-Saxon*, 9, 16, 27.  
 Churchill, Charles, 192.  
*Church History of Britain*, 121, 134.  
 Churchyard, Thomas, 74.  
 Cibber, Colley, 164.  
*Citizen of the World, The*, 214, 216.  
*Civil Government*, 144, 153.  
 Clanvowe, Sir T., 35.  
 Clarendon, Earl of, 121, 134.



- Clarissa*, 194, 218.  
*Cleanness*, Poem of, 26.  
 "Cockney poets," 236.  
*Coleridge*, S. T., 234, 239, 241  
 245-8.  
*Colet*, Dean, 52.  
*Colin Clout*, 56, 69.  
*Colin Clout come Home again*, 89.  
*Collins*, William, 192, 200.  
*Comedy of Errors*, 96.  
*Complaint of Mars*, 41.  
*Complaint of Rosamund*, 78.  
*Complaint to Pity*, *The*, 41.  
*Compleat Angler*, 121.  
*Comus*, 126.  
*Confessions of an English Opium  
 Eater*, 239.  
*Confessio Amantis*, 35.  
*Congreve*, William, 140.  
*Constable*, Henry, 77.  
*Constitutional History*, Hallam's,  
 240.  
*Coriolanus*, 99.  
*Corneille*, 139.  
*Cotter's Saturday Night*, 207.  
*Count Robert and Castle Dangerous*,  
 264.  
*Country Mouse and the Town Mouse*,  
*The*, 139.  
*Country Wife*, *The*, 141.  
*Court of Love*, *The*, 56.  
*Coverdale*, Miles, 54.  
*Cowley*, Abraham, 119, 130.  
*Cowper*, William, 193, 203-5.  
*Crabbe*, George, 193, 236.  
*Cranford*, 277.  
*Cranmer*, Thomas, 54, 66.  
*Crashaw*, Richard, 119.  
*Critical Essays*, Dryden's, 150.  
*Cromwell*, *Life and Letters of*, 274.  
*Cuckoo and Nightingale*, *The*, 35.  
*Curse of Kehama*, *The*, 249.  
*Cymbeline*, 99.  
*Cynewulf*, 7, 12.  
*Cynthia's Revels*, 102.  
*Cypress Grove*, *A*, 85.  
  
*Dampier*, William, 145.  
*Dance of the Deadly Sins*, *The*, 56, 68.  
*Daniel Deronda*, 277.  
*Daniel*, Samuel, 77, 78, 84.  
*Dante*, 33, 236.  
*Darwin*, Charles, 272, 275.  
  
*Darwin*, Erasmus, 192.  
*Davenant*, Sir John, 119, 140.  
*Davies*, Sir John, 78.  
*Debate of the Carpenter's Tools*,  
*The*, 26.  
*Decameron*, *The*, 33.  
*Decline and Fall of the Roman  
 Empire*, 195, 226.  
*Defence of Poesie*, 84, 108.  
*Defence of the People of England*,  
 127.  
*Defoe*, Daniel, 157, 165.  
*Deformed Transformed*, *The*, 252.  
*Dekker*, Thomas, 77, 82.  
*Delia*, 77.  
*Denham*, Sir John, 119.  
*Deor's Complaint*, 7.  
*Deserted Village*, *The*, 215, 216.  
*De Quincey*, 239.  
*Diana*, 77.  
*Diary*, Pepys', 144, 157.  
*Dickens*, Charles, 272, 276.  
*Discoveries on Men*, etc., Ben  
 Jonson's, 85, 101.  
*Disraeli*, Benjamin, 238.  
*Dissertation upon the Epistles of  
 Phalaris*, 144.  
*Divine Comedy*, *The*, 33.  
*Dombey and Son*, 276.  
*Don Juan*, 236, 252.  
*Donne*, John, 78, 105.  
*Don Roderick*, 263.  
*Don Sebastian*, 149.  
*Double Dealer*, *The*, 140.  
*Douglas*, Gavin, 56.  
*Dramatic Literature of Queen  
 Elizabeth*, Hazlitt's, 239.  
*Drapier Letters*, 179.  
*Drummond*, William, 77, 85.  
*Dryden* John, 138, 140, 142, 146-51.  
*Duchess of Malfy*, 82.  
*Dunbar*, William, 56, 67.  
*Dunciad*, *The*, 163, 171, 172.  
*Dunstan*, 5, 8.  
*Drayton*, Michael, 77, 78.  
*Dyer*, John, 163.  
  
*Earle's Microcosmographie*, 121.  
*Eastward Ho!* 101  
*Ecclesiastical Polity*, *Laws of*, 83,  
 112.  
*Edgeworth*, Maria, 237.  
*Edinburgh Review*, *The*, 239.

- Edward II.*, 90.  
*Edwin and Angelina*, 216.  
*Eikon Basilike*, 122.  
*Eikonoclastes*, 122, 127.  
*Elegy*, Gray's, 198, 200.  
*Elia, Essays of*, 239, 267.  
 Eliot, George (Mary Anne Evans), 272, 277.  
*Eloisa to Abelard*, 171.  
 Elyot, Sir Thomas, 54.  
*Emma*, 265.  
*Endymion*, 236, 259.  
*Endymion*, Lyly's, 81.  
*Enquiry into Public Errors*, 121.  
*Epicene, or the Silent Woman*, 102.  
*Epipsychidion*, 257.  
*Epithalamion*, 89.  
 Erasmus, 52.  
 Erigena, John Scotus, 8.  
*Esmond*, 276.  
*Essay on Criticism*, 163, 171, 277.  
*Essay on Man*, 163, 171.  
*Essay on the Human Understanding*, 144, 153.  
*Essays*, Bacon's, 114.  
*Essays Moral and Political*, 225.  
 Etheridge, Sir George, 140.  
*Euphues*, 76, 84.  
 Evelyn, John, *Diary of*, 145.  
*Eve of St. Agnes*, 259.  
*Every Man in his Humour*, 101.  
*Every Man out of His Humour*, 102.  
*Examiner, The*, 165, 178.  
*Excursion, The*, 245.  
*Exeter Book, The*, 8.  
  
*Fable of the Bees, The*, 168.  
*Fables*, Gay's, 163.  
*Faerie Queene*, 87, 89.  
*Fair Maid of Perth*, 264.  
*Faithful Shepherdess, The*, 105.  
*Falkland*, 238.  
*Fall of Princes*, 35.  
*Familiar Letters*, Walpole's, 196.  
 Farquhar, George, 140, 164.  
*Faustus, Tragical History of*, 82, 90.  
 Ferrier, Susan, 238.  
 Fielding, Henry, 194, 219-22.  
*Finnesburg, Fight of*, 7.  
 Fisher, Bishop, 52, 54.  
 Fletcher, Giles, 78.  
 Fletcher, John, 61, 82, 104.  
 Fletcher, Phineas, 78.  
*Flower and the Leaf, The*, 35.  
 Ford, John, 82.  
 Fortescue, Sir John, 37.  
*Fortunes of Nigel*, 264.  
 Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, 75.  
*Frederick the Great*, 274.  
*Freeholder, The*, 166, 181.  
 Freeman, Prof., 275.  
*French Revolution, History of*, 274.  
 Frobisher, Martin, 75.  
 Froude, James Anthony, 275.  
 Fuller, Thomas, 121, 133.  
 Froissart, 37, 53.  
  
*Gallant, The Wild*, 148.  
*Game and Play of Chess, The*, 53.  
 Gardiner, Prof., 275.  
 Garth, Samuel, 163.  
 Gascoigne, George, 74, 78.  
 Gaskell, Mrs., 277.  
 Gay, John, 163.  
*Gebir*, 236, 268.  
 Geoffrey of Monmouth, 22.  
*Gentleman Dancing Master, The*, 140.  
*Gentle Shepherd, The*, 163.  
 Gibbon, Edward, 195, 226-9.  
 Gildas, 2.  
*Gododin*, 1.  
 Godwin, William, 237.  
 Godwin's *Political Justice*, 241.  
*Golden Lyre, The*, 56, 68.  
 Goldsmith, Oliver, 192, 195, 212-7.  
*Go, Lovely Rose*, 130.  
*Good Natured Man, The*, 197, 215.  
 Googe, Barnabee, 74.  
*Gorboduc*, 61.  
*Gospel of St. John, Translation of*, 8.  
*Governail of Princes*, 35.  
*Governor, The*, 54.  
 Gower, John, 35.  
 Grafton, 75.  
 Gray, Thomas, 192, 198-200.  
*Great Exemplar*, 120, 132.  
 Green, Matthew, 163.  
 Greene, Robert, 77, 81, 84.  
*Gregory, Pastorals of*, Translated, 8, 16.  
 Greville, Fulke, 78.  
 Grocyn, William, 52, 53.  
 Grosseteste, Robert, 24.

- Grote, George, 275.  
*Guardian, The*, 166, 185.  
*Guy Mannering*, 264.  
*Gulliver's Travels*, 167, 178, 179.  
*Guthlac, St., Legends of*, 7.  
 Guy of Warwick, 25.
- Habington, William, 119.  
 Hadrian, 4.  
 Hakluyt's *Voyages*, 84.  
 Hall, Robert, 241.  
 Hallam, Henry, 240.  
*Hamlet*, 98.  
*Handful of Pleasant Delights, A*, 75.  
*Handlyng Synne*, 26.  
 Harrington, James, 121.  
 Harry the Blind Minstrel, 36.  
*Haunch of Venison, The*, 216.  
*Havelok the Dane*, 29.  
 Hawes, Stephen, 56.  
 Hazlitt, W., 239.  
 Hazlitt's Critical Lectures, 239.  
*Headley Hall*, 238.  
*Heart of Mid-Lothian*, 264.  
*Hellas*, 257.  
 Henry of Huntingdon, 22.  
*Henry IV.*, Play of, 97.  
*Henry V.*, Play of, 97.  
*Henry VI.*, Play of, 90.  
*Henry VIII.*, Play of, 99, 105.  
*Henry VIII.'s Reign, History of*, 114.  
 Herbert, George, 119.  
*Hero and Leander*, 78, 90.  
*Heroes and Hero Worship*, 278.  
 Heroic metre, 34, 119, 138.  
 Herrick, Robert, 119, 129.  
*Hesperides*, 119, 129.  
 Heywood, John, 60, 82.  
 Higden, Ralph, 37, 59.  
*Hind and the Panther, The*, 139, 149.  
*History of British India*, 240.  
*History of England*, Hume's, 195.  
*History of England*, Macaulay's, 274.  
*History of Great Rebellion*, 121, 135.  
*History of his own Times*, 144, 158.  
*History of John Bull*, 167.  
*History of Scotland*, Robertson's, 195.  
*History of the Holy War*, 133.  
*History of the Reformation*, 144, 158.  
*History of the Tudors*, 275.  
*History of the World*, 84, 110.
- History of Troy*, 53.  
 Hobbes, Thomas, 121.  
*Hohenlinden*, 235.  
*Holinshed*, 75.  
*Holy Fair, The*, 207.  
*Holy Living and Holy Dying*, 120, 132.  
*Holy War*, 155.  
 Hood, Thomas, 237.  
 Hooker, Richard, 72, 83, 111.  
 Horn, King, 25.  
*House of Fame, The*, 41.  
 Howell's *Familiar Letters*, 121.  
*Hudibras*, 139.  
 Hume, David, 195, 224-6.  
*Humorous Lieutenant, The*, 105.  
*Humphrey Clinker*, 194, 223.  
 Hunt, Leigh, 236, 239.  
 Huxley, Henry, 272, 275.  
*Hylas and Philonous*, 168, 189.  
*Hymn on the Nativity*, 126.  
*Hymn to Adversity*, 200.  
*Hyperion*, 236, 258.
- Idea, The*, 77.  
*Idler, The*, 196, 212.  
*Idylls of the King*, 273.  
*Il Penseroso*, 126, 128.  
*Imaginary Conversations*, 239, 268.  
 Inchbald, Mrs., 237.  
*In Memoriam*, 273.  
*Inquiry into the Principles of Morals*, 225.  
*Interludes*, 60.  
*Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 241.  
*Irene*, 212.  
*Isabella*, 259.  
*Italy*, 236.  
*Ivanhoe*, 238, 264.
- James I., 36.  
*Jane Eyre*, 276.  
*Jew of Malta, The*, 90.  
*John Gilpin*, 204.  
 John of Salisbury, 24.  
 John of Trevisa, 37.  
*Johnson's Dictionary*, 196.  
 Johnson, Dr., 190, 192, 194, 207-12.  
*Jolly Beggars*, 207.  
*Jonathan Wild*, 221.  
 Jonson, Ben, 60, 77, 85, 100-4.  
*Joseph Andrews*, 220.



- Journal of Voyage to Lisbon*, 221.  
*Journal to Stella*, 179.  
*Judith*, 7.  
*Julian Maddalo*, 257.  
*Julius Caesar*, 98.  
  
 Keats, John 235, 257-9.  
*Kenilworth*, 264.  
*King and No King, A*, 82, 105.  
*King's Antiquary, The*, 54.  
*King's Quair, The*, 36.  
*King's Tragedy, The*, 273.  
*Knolles's History of the Turks*, 84.  
 Knowles, J. S., 241.  
 Knox, John, 55.  
 Knox, Robert, *Record of Captivity*, 145.  
*Kubla Khan*, 248.  
 Kyd, Thomas, 81.  
  
 La Bruyère, 164.  
*Lady of the Lake*, 235, 261, 263.  
 Lake Poets, 235.  
*L'Allegro*, 126.  
 Lamb, Charles, 236, 239, 265-8.  
*Lamia*, 236, 258.  
*Land of Cockayne, The*, 26, 30.  
 Landor, Walter Savage, 236, 239, 241, 268.  
 Lanfranc, 19.  
 Langland, William, 34, 45-8.  
 Latimer, Hugh, 54.  
 Law, William, 168.  
 Layamon, 26, 27-9.  
*Lay of the Ash, The*, 26.  
*Lay of the Last Minstrel*, 235, 261, 263.  
*Lear, King*, 99.  
 Lecky, Prof., 275.  
 Lee, Nathaniel, 140.  
*Lectures on Shakespeare, Coleridge's*, 248.  
*Legend of Good Women*, 41.  
*Legend of Montrose*, 264.  
 Leland, John, 54.  
*Letters of Junius*, 196.  
*Letters of Peter Plymley*, 239.  
*Letters on a Regicide Peace*, 230.  
*Letters on Toleration*, 144, 153.  
*Letter to a Noble Lord*, 230.  
*Leviathan*, 121.  
*Liberty of Prophesying, The*, 132.  
*Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, 155.  
  
*Life and Reign of Edward V.*, 53, 65.  
*Life of Byron*, Moore's, 240.  
*Life of Carlyle*, Froude's, 275.  
*Life of Dr. Arnold*, Stanley's, 275.  
*Life of Dr. Johnson*, Boswell's, 197, 207.  
*Life of Edward, Earl of Clarendon*, 135.  
*Life of Goethe*, Lewis's, 275.  
*Life of Nelson*, 240, 249.  
*Life of Scott*, Lockhart's, 240.  
*Life of Sterling*, 275.  
*Life of Wolsey*, 55.  
 Linacre, Thomas, 52.  
 Lingard, John, 240.  
*Lives of the Poets*, Johnson's, 196, 211.  
 Locke, John, 143, 152.  
 Lodge, Thomas, 77, 78, 81, 84.  
*London*, Johnson's, 212.  
*Lord of the Isles, The*, 235, 263.  
*Love for Love*, 140.  
*Love in a Wood*, 140.  
 Lovelace, Richard, 119.  
*Love's Labour's Lost*, 82, 96.  
*Love Song of Genevieve*, 248.  
*Love Triumphant*, 149.  
*Lucrece*, 78, 97.  
*Lycidas*, 124, 127.  
 Lydgate, John, 35.  
 Lyly, John, 76, 81.  
 Lyly, William, 52.  
 Lyndsay, Sir David, 56.  
*Lyrical Ballads*, 234, 244, 246.  
  
 Macaulay, T. B., 240, 272, 274.  
*Macbeth*, 99.  
*MacCrie's Life of Knox*, 240.  
*Mac Flecknoe*, 147, 149.  
 Mackenzie, H., 195.  
*Mackintosh's Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, 241.  
*Madoc*, 249.  
*Magnificence, The*, 59, 69.  
*Maid's Tragedy*, 82, 105.  
*Malden, Battle of* (see *Byrhtnoth*).  
 Malherbe, 137.  
 Malory, Sir Thomas, 38.  
 Malthus, 241.  
 Mandeville, Bernard de, 168.  
*Manfred*, 252.  
 Mannyng, Robert, 26.  
*Mansfield Park*, 237, 264.  
 Map, Walter, 24.  
*Marius the Epicurean*, 278.



Marlowe, Christopher, 77, 78, 81, 90.  
*Marmion*, 235, 261, 263.  
 Marston, John, 78, 82.  
*Martin Marprelate Pamphlets*, 85.  
*Martin Chuzzlewit*, 276.  
 Marvell, Andrew, 119, 138.  
*Mary Barton*, 277.  
*Mary Morrison*, 206.  
 Mason, William, 196, 211.  
*Massacre of Paris*, 90.  
 Massinger, Philip, 82.  
*Masques*, 60, 102.  
 Matthew of Paris, 22.  
 May, Thomas, 121.  
*Mazeppa*, 252.  
*Measure for Measure*, 98.  
*Medal, The*, 147, 149.  
*Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, 167.  
*Merchant of Venice*, 97.  
 Merlin, 1.  
*Merry Wives of Windsor*, 97.  
*Messiah, The*, 171.  
*Middlemarch*, 277.  
 Middleton, Thomas, 82.  
*Midsummer Night's Dream*, 97.  
 Mill, James, 240, 241.  
 Mill, John Stuart, 275.  
*Mill on the Floss, The*, 277.  
 Milton, John, 61, 118, 123-8.  
 Minot, Laurence, 26.  
*Mirabilis*, 138, 148.  
 Miracle Plays, 20, 57-9.  
*Mirror of Magistrates*, 74.  
 Mitford, Mary, 237.  
 Mitford, William, 240.  
*Modern Painters*, 277.  
 Molière, 141.  
*Monastery, The*, 264.  
*Monna Innominata*, 273.  
 Montague, Charles, Lord Halifax, 114, 139, 144.  
 Montagu, Lady M., 167.  
 Montaigne, 114, 144.  
 Moore, Thomas, 235.  
*Moral Essays*, 163, 170.  
 Moralities, 59.  
 Morgan, Lady, 237.  
 More, Sir Thomas, 52, 62-5.  
 Morris, William, 274.  
*Morte d'Arthur*, 38.  
*Much Ado about Nothing*, 98.  
*Mother Hubbard's Tale*, 89.

*Mourning Bride The*, 140.  
*My Nannie O!* 206.  
 Napier's *History of the Peninsular War*, 240.  
 Nash, Thomas, 81.  
*Natural History of Selborne*, 197.  
 Nennius, 2.  
*New Atlantis*, 84, 114.  
*Newcomes, The*, 276.  
 Newman, Cardinal, 275.  
 Newton, Sir Isaac, 143.  
*Nicholas Nickleby*, 276.  
*Nightmare Abbey*, 238.  
*Noble Numbers, The*, 129.  
*North and South*, 277.  
 North, Sir Thomas, 74.  
*Northanger Hall*, 264.  
 Norton, Thomas, 62.  
*Novum Organum*, 115.  
 Occleve, Thomas, 35.  
*Oceana*, 121.  
*Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*, 149.  
*Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton*, 200.  
*Ode on a Grecian Urn*, 236, 259.  
*Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, 273.  
 Odes, Collins's, 201.  
*Odes To the West Wind, To a Skylark, etc.*, 257.  
*Ode to a Nightingale*, 236, 259.  
*Ode to Anne Killigrew*, 149.  
*Ode to Spring*, 200.  
 Odericus Vitalis, 18.  
*Old Bachelor, The*, 140.  
*Old Mortality*, 264.  
*Olney Hymns*, 205.  
 Opie, Mrs., 237.  
*Opus Majus*, 24.  
*Oriental Eclogues*, 201.  
*Oriental Tales, The*, 252.  
*Origin of Species*, 275.  
*Orlando*, 81.  
*Ormulum*, 26.  
*Ossian, Paraphrases of*, 192.  
 Oswald, 9.  
 Othello, 99.  
 Otway, Thomas, 140.  
 Overbury, Sir Thomas, *Characters*, 85.  
*Owl and the Nightingale, The*, 27.

- Pageants, 60.  
 Paine's *Rights of Man*, 241.  
*Palace of Pleasure, The*, 74.  
 Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*, 241.  
*Pamela*, 194, 218.  
*Panther, Fable of the*, 7.  
*Paradise Lost*, 118, 127.  
*Paradise of Dainty Devices, The*, 75.  
*Paradise Regained*, 127.  
*Paraphrase*, Caedmon's, 7, 12.  
 Park, Mungo, 240.  
*Parliament of Fowls*, 41.  
 Parnell, Thomas, 163.  
 Parry, Sir W. E., 240.  
*Passionate Pilgrim to his Love*, 90.  
*Pastorals*, Pope's, 171.  
 Pater, Walter, 278.  
*Patience*, Poem of, 26.  
 Patmore, Coventry, 274.  
 Peacock, T. L., 236, 238.  
*Pearl*, Poem of, 26.  
 Pearson, John, 121.  
 Pecock, Reginald, 37.  
 Peele, George, 81.  
*Pendennis*, 276.  
 Pepys, Samuel, 137, 144, 156.  
 Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, 192.  
*Peregrine Pickle*, 194, 222.  
*Pericles*, 99.  
*Persuasion*, 264.  
 Petrarch, 33.  
*Peveril of the Peak*, 264.  
 Phaer, 74.  
*Phaon*, 81.  
*Philaster*, 82, 105.  
 Philip, Ambrose, 163.  
 Philip, John, 163.  
*Philosophic Essays*, 168.  
*Pickwick Papers, The*, 276.  
*Piers Plowman, Vision of*, 34, 45.  
*Pilgrim's Progress*, 145, 155.  
 Pindaric Ode, 119, 130, 139.  
 Pindaric Odes, Gray's, 200.  
*Plain Dealer, The*, 141.  
*Pleasures of Memory, The*, 236.  
*Poetaster, The*, 102.  
*Political Discoveries*, 225.  
*Polycraticus*, 24.  
 Poor, Bishop, 27.  
 Pope, Alexander, 159, 162, 169-173.  
 Prayer Book, 54, 67.  
*Prelude, The*, 245.  
*Pricke of Conscience, The*, 26.  
*Pride and Prejudice*, 237, 264.  
*Principia*, 143.  
 Prior, Mat, 139, 163.  
*Prisoner of Chillon*, 252.  
*Prometheus*, 252.  
*Prometheus Unbound*, 236, 257.  
*Prothalamion*, 89.  
 Puttenham, Webster, 54.  
 Quarles, Francis, 119.  
*Quarterly, The*, 239.  
*Queen Mab*, 256.  
*Quentin Durward*, 238, 264.  
 Racine, 139.  
 Radcliff, Mrs., 237.  
 Raleigh, Sir Walter, 77, 84, 109.  
*Ralph Roister Doister*, 61.  
*Rambler, The*, 196, 212.  
 Ramsay, Allan, 162, 163.  
*Rape of the Lock, The*, 163, 171.  
*Rasselas*, 194, 212.  
*Recluse, The*, 243.  
*Red Gauntlet*, 264.  
*Reflections on the French Revolution*, 230.  
*Religio Laici*, 139, 149.  
 Renaissance in Learning, 50.  
*Repression of Overmuch Blaming of the Clergy*, 37.  
*Review, The*, 165, 187.  
*Revolt of Islam, The*, 236, 257.  
 Reynolds', Sir Joshua, *Discourses*, 197.  
*Rhododaphne*, 236.  
*Rhyming History of England*, 26.  
 Ricardo, David, 241.  
 Richardson, Samuel, 194, 217-19.  
*Riddles*, Cynewulf's, 7, 12.  
 Ridley, Nicholas, 54.  
 Rime royal, 34, 41.  
*Ring and the Book, The*, 273.  
*Rivals, The*, 197.  
 Robert of Gloucester, 26.  
 Robertson, Dr., 195.  
 Robin Hood, 27, 55.  
*Robinson Crusoe*, 167, 187.  
 Robinson, Ralph, 65.  
*Rob Roy*, 264.  
*Roderick*, 249.  
*Roderick Random*, 194, 222.

- Rogers, Samuel, 236.  
*Roland, Lay of*, 25.  
 Rolle, Richard, 26, 27.  
*Romance of Rosalynde*, 84.  
*Roman de la Rose*, 41.  
*Romeo and Juliet*, 96.  
*Romola*, 277.  
*Rosamund Gray*, 268.  
 Rossetti, Christina, 273.  
 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, 272, 273.  
 Rousseau, J. J., 232.  
*Rowley Poems*, 193, 202.  
*Rule a Wife, etc.*, 105.  
*Rule of the Anchoresses, The*, 27.  
 Ruskin, Mr., 277.
- Sackville, Thomas, 62, 74.  
*Sad Shepherd, The*, 102.  
*Samson Agonistes*, 128.  
*Sartor Resartus*, 277.  
*Satire of the Three Estates*, 59.  
*Scenes from Clerical Life*, 277.  
*School for Scandal*, 197.  
*Schoolmaster, The*, 75, 107.  
*Scornful Lady, The*, 105.  
 Scott, Sir Walter, 235, 238, 259-64.  
 Scotus, Duns, 23.  
*Sebastian, Don*, 149.  
*Seasons, The*, 163, 174.  
*Sejanus*, 102.  
 Selden, John, 84.  
*Sense and Sensibility*, 237, 264.  
*Sentimental Journey, The*, 194, 224.  
*Seven Lamps of Architecture, The*, 277.  
 Shaftesbury, Lord, 168.  
 Shakespeare, William, 72, 77, 78, 82, 91-100.  
 Shelley, P. B., 235, 239, 241, 253-57.  
 Shelley group of poets, 235.  
*Shepherd's Calendar, The*, 77, 86, 89.  
*Shepherd's Calendar*, Gay's, 163.  
 Sherlock, William, 143.  
 Sheridan, Richard Brinsley, 197.  
*She Stoops to Conquer*, 197, 215.  
*She Would if She Could*, 140.  
*Shirley*, 277.  
 Shirley, James, 83.  
 Sidney, Sir Philip, 77, 84, 107-109.  
*Siege of Rhodes*, 120, 140.  
 Siege of Troy, Stories of, 25.  
*Silas Marner*, 277.
- Sir Charles Grandison*, 219.  
*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 26.  
*Siris*, 168, 189.  
 Skelton, John, 56, 68.  
 Smith, Adam, 196.  
 Smith, Sidney, 239.  
 Smollett, Tobias, 194.  
*Song of the Husbandmen*, 26.  
*Song of the Shirt*, 237.  
*Sonnets from the Portuguese*, 273.  
 Sonnets, First, 56, 70.  
 South, Robert, 143.  
 Southerne, Thomas, 140.  
 Southey, Robert, 235, 239, 248.  
*Spanish Tragedy*, 81.  
*Specimens of Elizabethan Poets*, 239, 268.  
*Spectator, The*, 166, 181, 183, 185.  
 Speed, John, 84.  
 Spelman, Henry, 84.  
 Spencer, Herbert, 272, 275.  
 Spenserian Stanza, 77.  
 Spenser, Edmund, 72, 77, 86-90.  
 Stanley, Arthur Penryn, 275.  
 Steele, Richard, 157, 165, 184-8.  
*Steel Glass, The*, 78.  
 Sterne, Laurence, 194, 223.  
 Stillingfleet, Edward, 143.  
*Stones of Venice*, 277.  
 Stow, 75.  
*Studies in the Renaissance*, 278.  
 Suckling, Sir John, 119.  
 Surrey, Earl of, 56, 69-71.  
 Swift, Jonathan, 157, 167, 176-180.
- Tale of a Tub*, 167, 177, 179.  
*Tales of a Grandfather*, 264.  
*Talisman, The*, 264.  
*Tamburlaine*, 82, 90.  
*Taming of the Shrew*, 97.  
*Tam o' Shanter*, 206.  
*Task, The*, 193, 204.  
*Tatler, The*, 165, 185.  
 Taylor, Jeremy, 121, 131-3.  
 Tasso, 87.  
*Tempest, The*, 82, 99.  
*Temple of Glass, The*, 35.  
 Temple, Sir William, 144.  
 Tennyson, Lord, 272.  
*Testament of Love, The*, 37.  
 Thackeray, W. M., 272, 276.  
*Thalaba*, 249.

- Theodore, Archbishop, 4.  
 Thirlwall, Connop, 275.  
*Thistle and the Rose, The*, 56, 68.  
 Thomson, James, 163, 173-6.  
*Thoughts on Education*, 153.  
*Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, 196.  
 Tickell, Thomas, 163.  
 Tillotson, Archbishop, 143.  
*Timon of Athens*, 99.  
*Tintern Abbey, Lines on*, 245.  
*Titus Andronicus*, 96.  
*Tom Jones*, 194, 221.  
*Tottel's Miscellany*, 57.  
 Tournour, Cyril, 82.  
*Toxophilus*, 106.  
*Tracts on Government*, 153.  
*Traveller, The*, 215.  
*Traveller's Song, The*, 7.  
*Tragical Tales*, 74.  
 Translations of Horace (Pope's), 171.  
 Translation of *Iliad* (Pope's), 171.  
 Translation of *Odyssey* (Pope's), 171.  
*Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, 37.  
*Treatise on Human Knowledge*, 188.  
*Tristan and Isolde*, Legend of, 25.  
*Tristram Shandy*, 194, 224.  
*Troilus and Cressida*, 41, 98.  
*Troye Book*, 35.  
 Turberville, George, 74.  
*Twelfth Night*, 98.  
*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 96.  
*Two Noble Kinsmen*, 99, 105.  
 Tyndale, William, 54, 65.  
 Tyndall, John, 275.  
 Udall, Nicholas, 61.  
*Universal History*, 37.  
*Urn Burial, The*, 121.  
 Usk, Thomas, 37.  
*Utopia*, 53, 64.  
 Vanbrugh, Sir John, 140, 164.  
*Vanity Fair*, 276.  
*Vanity of Human Wishes, The*, 212.  
 Vaughan, Henry, 119.  
*Venus and Adonis*, 78, 96.  
*Vercelli Book, The*, 8.  
*Vicar of Wakefield*, 195, 215, 216.  
*View of the Middle Ages*, 240.  
*Village, The*, 193.  
*Villette*, 276.  
*Virginians, The*, 276.  
*Vision of Judgment*, Byron's, 236, 252.  
*Vision of Judgment*, Southey's, 249.  
*Vivian Grey*, 238.  
*Volpone the Fox*, 82, 102.  
 Wace, 26.  
 Waller, Edmund, 119, 129.  
 Walpole, Horace, 194.  
 Walton, Izaak, 121.  
*Wanderer, The*, 7.  
 Warburton, Bishop, 168.  
 Warham, Archbishop, 52.  
 Warner, W., 78.  
*Wars of York and Lancaster, The*, 78.  
 Warton's *History of Poetry*, 192.  
*Waverley*, 238, 262, 264.  
*Wealth of Nations*, 196.  
 Webster, John, 82.  
*Whale, Fable of the*, 7.  
 White, Gilbert, 197.  
*Why come ye not to Court?* 56, 69.  
*Wild Gallant, The*, 147.  
*Wilhelm Meister*, Translation of, 240.  
 William of Malmesbury, 22.  
 William of Shoreham, 27.  
 Wilson, John, 239.  
 Wilson, Thomas, 54.  
*Windsor Forest*, 171.  
*Winter's Tale*, 82, 99.  
 Wither, George, 119.  
 Wolsey, Cardinal, 53.  
*Woodstock*, 264.  
 Wordsworth, William, 234, 239, 241, 242-5.  
*Worthies of England*, 121, 134.  
 Wulfstan, 9.  
 Wycherley, William, 140.  
 Wyclif, John, 34, 37, 47, 48.  
 Wyatt, Sir Thomas, 56.  
 Wynken de Worde, 56.  
*Ye Banks and Braes*, 206.  
*Ye Mariners of England*, 235.  
 Young, Edward, 163.



# A CATALOGUE OF BOOKS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS OF METHUEN AND COMPANY PUBLISHERS : LONDON 36 ESSEX STREET W.C.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
FORTHCOMING BOOKS, . . . . .	2
POETRY, . . . . .	13
BELLES LETTRES, ANTHOLOGIES, ETC., . . . . .	14
ILLUSTRATED BOOKS, . . . . .	15
HISTORY, . . . . .	15
BYZANTINE TEXTS, . . . . .	17
BIOGRAPHY, . . . . .	18
TRAVEL, ADVENTURE AND TOPOGRAPHY, . . . . .	18
NAVAL AND MILITARY, . . . . .	21
GENERAL LITERATURE, . . . . .	21
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, . . . . .	23
PHILOSOPHY, . . . . .	24
THEOLOGY, . . . . .	24
FICTION, . . . . .	27
BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS, . . . . .	35
THE PEACOCK LIBRARY, . . . . .	35
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERIES, . . . . .	36
SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY . . . . .	37
CLASSICAL TRANSLATIONS' . . . . .	37
EDUCATIONAL BOOKS, . . . . .	38

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